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indian horizons

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Raja Ramanna
Physical Space in the Context of all Knowledge

N. Nityagopal
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S.C. Malik
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Book Review

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पुस्तकालय
गु० का० विश्वविद्यालय
हरिद्वार

indian horizons

Raja Ramanna 1
Physical Space in the Context of all Knowledge

A. Nityagopal 7
Oriental Philosophy and Unitary Principles: Certain Parables with Modern Science

S.C. Malik 15
Dimensionless Space as Eternal Silence

Jyotindra Jain 23
Parallel Structures

Kalindi Charan Panigrahi 29
Celebrating the Victory

Krishan Chander 39
The Cat and the Minister

Book Reviews 47

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पुस्तकालय
गु० कां० विश्वविद्यालय

indian horizons

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay 1
Theatre in Russia

Sisirkumar Ghose 27
Mysticism in Sri Aurobindo

Vilas Sarang 35
Testimony of an Indian Vulture

Devabrata Das 41
In the Land of the Dead

Book Reviews 47

CONTRIBUTORS to this issue

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Physical Space in the Context of all Knowledge

Raja Ramanna

The* basic problem in understanding the overall nature of physical space comes about from the fact that by asking questions about ourselves it is not clear whether we are able to understand our own nature. In ancient writings the statement 'know thyself' appears frequently. To know oneself, one has to ask questions about oneself and in this process the question arises whether it is valid to ask questions about oneself to get the correct answers. This has been the basic difficulty in arriving at a total understanding of physical space including ourselves.

Many centuries ago, a general classification was attempted by dividing all knowledge into three parts, '*chit, achit* and *Eshwara*' which means 'matter with consciousness, inanimate matter and God'. This division into three parts already involves questions about itself, such as what is the meaning of consciousness and what is the definition and need for God. Every intelligent living being is fully aware of the existence of a consciousness, but if one is asked to define it he will find it very difficult, particularly in the context of physical space. Physical space claims that it can eventually explain all knowledge including that of consciousness since its basic building blocks are indistinguishable molecules, but at the moment with all its successes the word 'consciousness' remains undefinable. It is a situation in which we know that something exists but can find no clear description in physical terms. Nearly 1300 years ago, Adi Sankara in his Dakshinamurthy stotra, verse 23, says 'if consciousness was not self-manifested then the Universe would be blind darkness'. This celebrated statement shows that consciousness has to be self-manifested and if it was not there, nobody would know that there is such a thing as physical space.

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* Paper presented at the International Seminar on Inner & Outer Space, New Delhi. 1986.

Let us go back to the division of all knowledge of '*chit*, *achit* and *Eshwara*'. As stated above, '*chit* refers to consciousness without which the physical world does not exist. '*achit*' is the physical world which we can understand reasonably well through the language of mathematics and the study of the basic sciences. Our present knowledge of physical space is vast and we do know that its constituents involve radiation of various sorts, atoms and molecules with complex interactions taking place between them and the temptation to believe that 'Chit' comes out from 'Achit' is great, i.e. consciousness is a product of inanimate objects in interaction. And finally, 'Eshwara' is necessary only if you ask 'non-scientific' questions such as 'who made us' and 'what is good and evil'.

It is shown here that our present ideas of physical space comes into a conflict with the existence of consciousness as a separate entity and yet without its very existence there can be no physical space. Adi Sankara was aware of these problems a long time ago and made a formidable attempt to encompass the whole of knowledge. We refer to this later.

Immediately after World War II, as a result of the discoveries of science and the various new technologies that have been developed during the war, the general feeling among scientists was that the time had come for science to take over, in explaining all the mysteries of the world and the Universe. It is not the first time a totally materialistic view of the Universe has been conceived. In India, the Charvakas were convinced of it, and later the rationalists of Europe and in more recent times the Marxists. The post-war approach was to include not merely physical space within the framework of science but even the very origin and mystery of life, and show how the existence of consciousness comes about from purely physico-chemical considerations. It must be made clear here that when the word consciousness is used it does not refer to programmed systems like in the lower forms of life but to the special quality of the higher forms of life which permits them to ask questions about themselves, be it questions like 'why are we here', 'why in the present form' and 'what is the criterion for ethical behaviour'. Could these be explained away as some complex thermodynamic laws?

By 1945, the structure of the atom had been sufficiently understood to create forces that could destroy large parts of the world in extremely short periods of time. It was also clear that the same force could be used for the benefit of mankind. At about the same time it came about that one could cure nearly all diseases which were the menace of the period specially with the development of antibiotics. The application of molecular dynamics to biology had brought the field of biology closer to the fundamental sciences.

The spirit of the times can well be appreciated if one follows the development of science since the end of World War II. The governments began to pour in a lot of money in scientific establishments not necessarily for increasing knowledge but essentially to improve their military systems. In spite of the fact that the motivation was one of self-destruction, science progressed so rapidly that we are now able to understand physical processes which take place in spaces as small as 10^{-14} cms to distances of several millions light years. Macroscopic phenomena was fairly well understood even by the end of the last century and it is only in this century atoms and molecules were observed and their laws delineated. Science has progressed sufficiently in recent times to be able to say, yes the Universe was indeed created several billion years ago at an instant of time and models have been worked out as to how evolution of the Universe has taken place as we observe it now. Science developed a new confidence with the understanding of biological processes involving cell structure and molecular dynamics. Genetics was no longer the mystery that it was. With all these great discoveries it is not surprising that science and scientists began to develop a position of arrogance, in that they had created a system not only to explain everything and it was one with a flexibility to explain all things yet to be discovered.

In spite of all these unbelievable fantastic advances, our attempts to understand life is still far from clear. It was considered at one time that with the development of computers and information theory we would have a complete understanding of our brain. This has, however, not happened and the working of the brain remains a mystery.

While we have to admit that physical space is well understood through the laws of science coupled with the language of mathematics, the development of science is still based on several inherent inconsistencies. We enumerate some of these inconsistencies which worry many scientists though it must be admitted that there are a large number of scientists who just do not bother about such matters because the criterion for a scientific theory to them, seems to be that as long as it is useful to predict and explain phenomena quantitatively, it is good enough. If its basic structure and epistemology also turn out to be consistent, so much the better, but if these happen to contain inconsistencies at its foundation, surely a time will come when these problems will be solved and so why worry about these when the successes are overwhelming. Be that as it may, as things go, the very language of science itself has inconsistencies of a very deep nature. The inconsistencies of mathematics seem to be something of a chronic and permanent nature.

Many years ago, E.P. Winger, the distinguished physicist who introduced symmetry as the basis of all physical laws wrote a paper entitled 'The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences'. This means that mathematics works very well as a language for explaining scientific phenomena but why that is so could be an accident. From the early part of the century several mathematicians had pointed out that there are basic inconsistencies in the body of the foundations of mathematics itself. For example, the celebrated theorem of Godel (1936), proven in a most rigorous manner, states that there are many truths in mathematics which can never be proved. It shows that the incompleteness in mathematics is not due to ignorance but due to its very basic structure. While earlier mathematicians were working on trying to show how mathematics is totally consistent and the inconsistencies are due to incomplete knowledge, the Godel theorem shows that this is just impossible because inconsistencies result from the very postulates of mathematics itself. The theorem shows that in a field which we consider as the most logical of developments in human thinking, there are inherent inconsistencies and if mathematics, is a language of science, science itself is apparently subject to inconsistencies.

As an example of inconsistencies in science, we recall some of the historical developments of science. At the end of the last century a mechanistic view of the real world had established itself as the only answer to all phenomena and yet when the atom was discovered, completely new ideas had to be introduced which to a classical physicist would have meant total inconsistency. The earlier physicists would have considered a wave and a particle as opposite ends of a physical description, but now we are used to living with the fact that both the descriptions are simultaneously necessary in explaining atomic phenomena. We have just got used to it and an appropriate mathematical apparatus involving probability has been developed to keep these seemingly inconsistencies as one. But it has meant that the idea of probability is not now a question of chance in a game, but an inescapable part in the behaviour of nature itself.

While this description known as quantum mechanics has been roaringly successful in explaining the greater aspects of atomic phenomena, practically every scientist will agree that there are deep inconsistencies in the theory. Some will explain it away by saying that at present it is an incomplete theory and a complete satisfactory theory will evolve in due course of time. Others use the old argument that as long as it works, it is all that matters in physics. A typical example of inconsistency in quantum mechanics is, while phenomena is described on the basis of probability it becomes a physical certainty when consciousness interacts with the observed phenomena and in this way consciousness enters the phenomena fundamentally and inescapably. But as mentioned earlier, consciousness is a vague, physically undefined quantity and yet it finds itself in science as an integral part. Thus a non-scientific quantity enters the description of physical processes. How do we reconcile all this?

The two inconsistencies, one in mathematics and one in physics, are mentioned here merely to show that inconsistencies by themselves do not lead to the rejection of a theory totally. Even science has to live with inconsistencies as long as it serves the purpose of explaining a large body of phenomena. It is, therefore, clear that if we have to include all knowledge including physical space it is more than likely that many more inconsistencies will have to be accepted by us. But where do we draw the line.

On the other extreme, religion is full of inconsistencies and in spite of its professed message of love it is full of cruelty, social injustice and downright foolishness. But philosophy we cannot reject and let us therefore look at the problems of consciousness in physical space from a totally philosophical standpoint.

We consider knowledge obtained purely by observation i.e. the observable world, as a set of 'Achit'. Another set will exist which is entirely devoted to knowledge depending on one's state of consciousness which we call the set of 'Chit'. The following possibilities exist:

a) The 'Achit' set is a sub-set of the 'Chit' set since without 'Chit' there is nobody to observe. The remaining parts of the 'Chit' set allows for the non-observable world which includes intuition, mysticism, mythology and the appreciation of the arts. This implies $S_{achit} \subseteq S_{chit}$

b) The 'Chit' set is a sub-set of the 'Achit' set. This is the stand point taken by the materialists, who believe that physics can explain everything and consciousness arises purely from molecular interactions. This implies $S_{chit} \subseteq S_{achit}$

c) There is an intersection between the 'Chit' and 'Achit' sets as is required by quantum mechanics. This implies

$$S_{chit} \cap S_{achit} \neq 0$$

Beyond these two sets there exists another set which includes the absolute symmetry containing all knowledge, be it of the observable nature or intuitively felt. This set is the very origin of things and includes such concepts as what physics calls 'Grand Unification'. It is perhaps justified in calling this set the 'Eshwara' set. We also note that it is the departure from absolute symmetry that gives rise to the sub-set of 'Chit' and 'Achit'. In earlier philosophy this was termed as 'Maya'.

It will be easily recognised that what has been said in some form of set language, is the same as that expressed with great clarity by Adi Sankara in the name of Advaita. It is also quite possible that he was thinking in terms of sets because sets were not unknown to the early logicians, the most startling one being the definition of length in Nyaya-Vaisesika which includes set theory and measure theory:

> "Distance and nearness are described as being of two kinds, viz. spatial as also temporal. The spatial kind abides only in limited things. Distance arises from a notion of preponderance of the conjunction (intersection) of limited things and nearness is said to arise from a notion of its meagreness". (Bhasa-Pariccheda by Shri Viswanatha—121st and 122nd slokas).

Whether we are satisfied with the description of all knowledge as being purely materialistic or recognise that even in the understanding of material process we introduce ideas which are totally non-materialistic, we have to admit we have not succeeded in understanding the science of consciousness. While there have been many psychological studies, a logical approach to the study of consciousness as a philosophico-scientific entity has only been attempted by Sankara. It is quite possible that we will never know what consciousness is mainly because the possible phases of consciousness in our brains are too constrained for asking questions about itself. Sankara believes that we must create a new conscious state well outside the waking state, the dream stage, drug stage etc. He asserts that it is a state that can be achieved where the oneness of the diversity of all knowledge can be clearly seen. He calls it the phase of Sushapti when the set becomes the set of all sets and yet is different. Grand Unification in physics may not require the need for a new mental state and the concept may not be acceptable to many hard boiled scientists, but scientific philosophy may be gradually converging to these views. We may stumble across in the process of grand unification theorems of the type of Godel, where the basic postulates themselves close the door to enquiry by the very restrictions of our consciousness. We may finally end up of dividing all knowledge back again into 'Chit, Achit and Eshwara' as the limit to all enquiry.

Oriental Philosophy and Unitary Principles: Certain Parables with Modern Science

A. Nityagopal

The* present debate between Science and Religion is trying to justify that both these fields of human inquiry are complementary but are not in conflict. General notion that prevails today is the success of science means it is the defeat of religion. The growing awareness that this notion as an error or an illusion has lead many philosophers to reiterate that "has this eclipsed human values and his very civilization?" Efforts were made, and are being made to reassess the equation and to provide an order. To this remarkable task of reframing the inner meaning of modern man and providing him with a basis for an unitary principle is what the contribution of Oriental Philosophy is.

BASIS OF ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHY: Indian meaning

Whether it is sacred or secular, the Indian philosophy has acquired a concept of unitary view from the Upanisads, which we have assimilated by developing reverence to all knowledge. Based on the Mundaka Upanisad (I. 1.4) all knowledge has two principal approaches, namely, the'parā vidyā' and the'aparā vidyā'. It is to the category of the aparā vidyā belongs the Vedas, the arts and the sciences, and all these deal with the transient phase or the changing structure of the world. I will now discuss the intricate interactions between these two subjects and finally arrive at a conclusion about the 'inner and outer space' in relation to the unitary principles guiding man.

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* Paper presented at the International Seminar on Inner & Outer Space, New Delhi, 1986.

Vedantic knowledge and the purpose of all scientific inquiry is based on the principle of "the pursuit of truth in its multidimensional aspects". The broad motto of Vedanta is 'Satyameva Jayate' which is the motto of the Republic of India, this is drawn from Mundaka Upanisad (III, 1.6), stating in its full form "Satyameva Jayate, nânrtam" meaning 'Truth alone triumphs, not untruth'. When we trace back the history of science, it is evident that the success of modern science is the triumph of the spirit of free inquiry over mere opinion, untested belief, prejudice and dogma.

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l}\text{Rationality of experimentation,}\\ \text{discoveries/ inventions based on}\\ \text{our understanding of relativity,}\\ \text{objective study of time \& space}\\ \text{(post 20th century studies)}\end{array}}{\begin{array}{l}\text{Opinion, untested belief, pre-}\\ \text{judice \& dogma}\\ \text{(pre 20th century concepts)}\end{array}} = \begin{array}{l}\text{the unity and totality of all}\\ \text{human knowledge, viewed}\\ \text{from both the synoptic}\\ \text{as well as synthetic approach}\end{array}$$

If we compromise that the truth is the aim of investigation in oriental philosophy, then it is the very truth that forms the integral part of all sciences.

It is the objective penetration of probing into the mysteries of nature that science is engaged in, on the contrary all oriental philosophy preaches the mode of arriving at the hidden truth is by clarity, objectivity and penetration. It is a simple equation:

$$\frac{\begin{array}{l}\text{Experimentation}\\ \text{(Scientific method)}\end{array}}{\begin{array}{l}\text{Experience}\\ \text{(Oriental approach)}\end{array}} = \begin{array}{l}\text{Discovery}\\ \text{of}\\ \text{truth}\end{array}$$

Now some of you might question when we have science which is based perfectly on logic, method and rationality, then why Vedanta?

Oriental philosophy aims at the broad aspects of Universe, the subject as a whole, leading to "experience", whereas science follows the path of "experiment" or investigation which encompass diverse fields each with separate entity. Hence, both the approaches are needed, and the matter of our concern is this balance, the perfect harmony leads to peaceful existence, therefore, these two are inter changeable and reversible.

Oriental knowledge ⇄ Scientific knowledge
(experience) (experiment)

Universal knowledge can be broadly categorised under two heads; i.e., the subjective understanding and the objective understanding. In Sanskrit, objective knowledge is known as ādhibhautika vidyā, which is in contradiction to ādhyātmika vidyā, which is self-knowledge. Swami Ranganathanandaji in his address to the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, said, "It is important to remember that this idea is basic to an understanding of Vedanta and to an understanding of whither science is going today". He arrives at a conclusion that modern science is the study of only one of the two categories, namely, the objective field. Swamiji explicitly puts forth that "modern science is also trying to understand the subjective field."

Closer understanding between western scientific advances and the observations of eastern mysticism and oriental knowledge is gradually emerging.

Systems biology views illness to be intimately linked with mental phenomenon which is integrated by both physical and psychological therapies. Fritjof Capra in the chapter on "Journeys Beyond Space and Time" states as follows : "The conceptual framework underlying such an approach will include not only the new systems biology but also a new systems psychology, a science of human experience and behaviour that which perceives the human organism as a dynamic system involving interdependent physiological and psychological patterns, and as being embedded in interacting larger systems of physical, social, and cultural dimensions."

Carl Gustav Jung who extended classical psychology drawing certain parables from oriental philosophy believes that "sooner or later, nuclear physics and the psychology of the unconscious will draw closer together as both of them, independently of one another and from opposite directions, push forward into transcendental territory.... Psyche cannot be totally different from matter, for how otherwise could it move matter? And matter cannot be alien to psyche, for how else could matter produce psyche? Psyche and matter exist in the same world, and each partakes of the other, otherwise any reciprocal action would be impossible. If research could only advance far enough, therefore, we should arrive at an ultimate agreement between physical and psychological concepts. Our present attempts may be bold, but I believe they are on the right lines."

The above process is regarded today as depth psychology which is being replaced by behaviouristic psychology of the West. This process of our understanding and accepting as a complementary phenomenon is a breakthrough in modern psychological science which, if we put sustained efforts, will lead us to the truth of the real nature of man unifying him with the principles of Vedanta which is based on the principle of undying self of man, the Ātman.

From psychological network, I would like to superficially evaluate the processes of evolution and its relation to oriental philosophy. Man is the maker of his own destiny—he created science and technology simultaneously with culture and civilization; today he is balancing peace and terror. Why is this? Everything about him is a mystery. In the book, *The Universe and Dr Einstein*, Lincoln Barnett says:

"In the evolution of scientific thought, one fact has become impressively clear; there is no mystery of the physical world which does not point to a mystery beyond itself. All highroads of the intellect, all byways of theory and conjecture, lead ultimately to an abyss that human ingenuity can never span. For man is enchained by the very condition of his being, his finiteness and involvement in nature."

Physicist Niels Bohr put it, "We are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence. Man is thus his own greatest mystery."

Viewing man in his depth and at the wake of self-realisation, the eminent paleontologist, Pere Teilhard de Chardin said, "The time has come to realize that an interpretation of the universe—even a positivist one—remains unsatisfying, unless it covers the interior as well as the exterior of things; mind as well as matter." I am sure certain aspects of this, the present international seminar on Inner and Outer Space is examining, leading to a valid conclusion which might give us a conceptual base in our understanding.

In the course of human sustenance we have undergone various levels of evolution. Principal form was cosmic evolution, then came the bigbang followed by continuous process of organic evolution which finally led us to the present state of Psycho-social Evolution.

Sir Julian Huxley, the noted biologist and science writer while addressing the forum at the Chicago University symposium in 1959 highlighted the role of spiritual awareness of the evolutionary process. Sir Huxley said:

> 'Man's evolution is not biological but psycho-social; it operates by the mechanism of cultural tradition, which involves the cumulative self-reproduction and self-variation of mental activities and their products. Accordingly, major steps in the human phase of evolution are achieved by breakthroughs to new dominant patterns of mental organization of knowledge, ideas, and beliefs—ideological instead of physiological or biological organisation.
>
> All dominant thought organizations are concerned with the ultimate, as well as with the immediate problems of existence or, I should rather say, with the most ultimate problems that the thought of the time is capable of formulating or even envisaging. They are all concerned with giving some interpretation of man, of the world which he is to live in, and of his place and role in that world—in other words, some comprehensive picture of human destiny and significance.'

We are all aware of organic satisfaction that our organic evolution has bestowed upon us. But, when these organic satisfactions are superseded by a certain level of "motivation" or a zeal for fulfilment, then there will be a conscious evolution gradually guided by an objective-oriented program. This conceptual shifting from being a mere organic composition is what leads to a process now being regarded as PSYCHO-SOCIAL evolution, and we are all the products of this awareness. Once we are ordained in this process then man's consciousness elevates from not only mere organic satisfaction but also that of the physical limitations, leading ultimately into a moral or ethical man. When we seek parables of this scientific process with oriental knowledge that what we call psycho-social evolution in biological science is similar to spiritual evolution in the science of religion. This is the stage where again experience of oriental philosophy merges with experiment in science leading to the process of unravelling the hidden truth—*satyam.* This is where Sri Sankaracharya in Bhaja Govindam says, says "Satyam̐-jñânam-añântam". And more so, in the eighteenth chapter, sixty-third verse of Gita, where Sri Krishna says:

Iti te jñânam ākhyātam guhyād
guhyataram̊ mayā,
Vimryisaitad aśeṣeṇa yathecchasi
tthâa kuru—

'Thus has wisdom more profound than all profundities been declared to thee by Me; reflecting over it fully, act as thou likest'.

In reply to this Arjuna says in the same chapter, seventy-third verse:

Nasto mohah smr̥tir labdhā
tvatprasādāt mayācyuta;
Sthito' smi gatasandahah
kariṣye vacanaṁ tava —

'Destroyed is my delusion, and I have gained my memory through thy grace, O Acyuta; I am firm; my doubts are gone; I will act as thou sayest.'

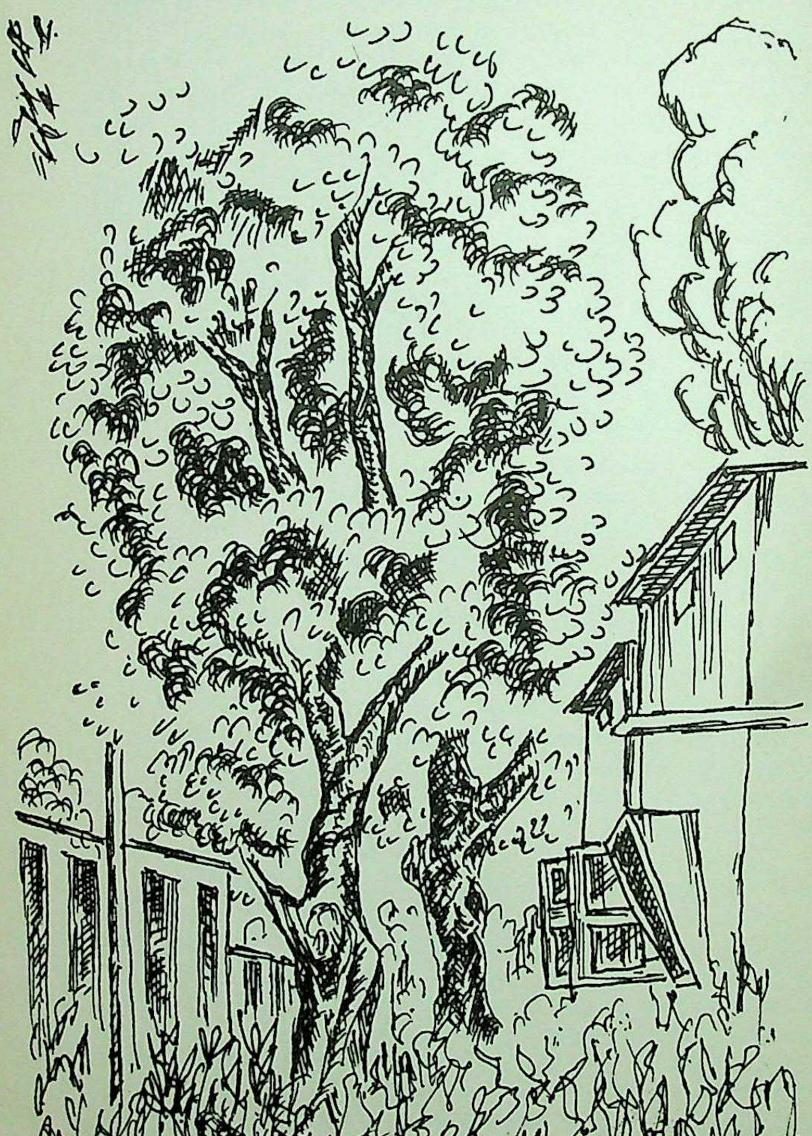
These parables of oriental philosophy can be best summarised in a single quotation from the book *The Science of Life* by H.G. Wells, G.P. Wells, and Sir Julian Huxley, which I quote as follows:

> 'The more intelligent and comprehensive man escapes from his ego by merger (identification with and participation in a greater being), and acquires an impersonal immortality in the association, his identity dissolving into the greater identity. This is the essence of much religious mysticism, and it is remarkable how closely the biological analysis of individuality brings us to the mystics. The individual, according to this second line of thought, saves himself by losing himself. But in mystical teaching, he loses himself in the Deity, and in the scientific interpretation of life, he forgets himself as someone else and discovers himself as Man. The Buddhist philosophy is that the individual life is a painful delusion from which men escape by conquest of individual desire. The Western mystic and the Eastern sage find a strong effect of endorsement in modern science and the everyday teaching of practical morality.'

Speaking on the theme "Science and Religion" Swami Ranganathanandaji summarises the essence of Vedantic thought as:

"Vedanta and Yoga, as the adhyātma-vidyā, the vidya, or science, of man in depth, the science and technique of a comprehensive spirituality encompassing action as well as contemplation. It is evident that Indian philosophy sees no conflict between physical sciences and this science of spirituality, between 'man, the known' and 'man, the unknown', between 'the physical man and the spiritual man."

This continuing dialogue of psycho-social or ethical man transformation is considered in the west as "humanistic psychology". After mid-1960's the intense developments became increasingly obvious leading to an awareness within the humanistic orientation which focused on spiritual, transcendental or mystical aspects of 'self-actualization' for which Abraham Maslow and Stanislav Grof coined the word "transpersonal psychology". This transpersonal psychology is the area that is directly or otherwise related with the process or recognition, understanding, and realization of transpersonal states of consciousness which on the other hand are integrating and bridging the spiritual quest of Man. This new psychology which is now passing under the hidden current of 'change' envisages human organism as an intwined whole (unitary concept) interdependent physical and psychological patterns. Hence, the conceptual basis of oriental philosophy is growing consistently with that of biology in the presence of physical environment with a strong awareness of unifying us in a meaningful manner to maintain Man-Nature harmony.



SANTADATTA 1982

Dimensionless Space as Eternal Silence

S.C. Malik

> "Words cannot describe everything.
> The heart's message cannot be delivered in words,
> If one receives words literally, he will be lost,
> If he tries to explain with words, he will not
> attain enlightenment in this life."
>
> *Saying of a Zen Master*

> "The Void is not of the nature of a black abyss
> or a bottomless pit,
> Rather is its nature 'vast and expansive like
> space itself,'
> It is apprehended as 'serene, marvellous, and
> pure, brilliant and all inclusive'.
> Above all does it partake of the nature of light,
> And it is not anything,
> *For Void is Mind itself, and Mind Itself is Void,*
> That is the answer."
>
> *A Chinese Saying*

Objective'* truth understanding at any given point of time is relative. But this process of 'knowing' is a dead end. This way of knowledge is part of the social system we are brought up in, wherein reason, explanations, cause-and-effect, objectivity *vs.* subjectivity, and so on, are taken to be axiomatic truths of a paradigm that arises out of a split-mind in which the vehicle of thought, of communication, i.e. language itself is dualistic. Therefore, whatever the efforts, direction, mankind is making towards 'knowledge', 'truth', etc, is only futile in the context of reaching the goals of wholeness, harmony, totality, or whatever other various labels that are, or have been, used in different cultural subgroups both diachronically and synchronically. What is required is a change of paradigm, a change of direction which is a 180° turnabout, about our very perceptions, i.e. the very perspective which governs human existence today. For example, Space, *Ākās*, has to be apprehended individually, subjectively yet not so in a way, by each Being. Consciousness exists as each Being, and nothing also exists. Truth is always present, and is exactly where we are, *Here and Now*, it is beyond space and time, beyond cause-and-effect.

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* Paper presented at the International Seminar on Inner & Outer Space, New Delhi, 1986.

The Now is a dimensionless point that vibrates and throbs in moments of Now; each moment being a totality. It is not apprehended by 'reasons' of a system that thinks dualistically, least of all in the structure of existing languages. In fact, the social system emerging from dualistic thinking covertly tabooes any other perspective especially the holistic view—of knowing 'who one is', 'who you are', or 'who I am', since this would negate all existing ways of behaviour and action and institutions (even if these claim to be reaching or achieving wholeness, harmony, peace, etc.). The present systems are limited to three-dimensional areas, whereas the total view belongs to another dimension—not necessarily a fourth one or may be *one* which is not related and does not at all arise out of the other three. The fourth or this 'dimension' we may say—includes the other three, once the fourth dimension is apprehended. In that space all concepts of time, space, linearity, etc. are seen: yet, not any more in the sense of what they were without the fourth. The earlier concepts of the three are now subservient, or serve the whole-mind or totality or reflect it. In this sense, coming from that fourth dimension, even the dualistic language becomes an instrument—vehicle—for its communication wherein the unsaid and unseen comes forth, beyond words—as in poetry or other expressions of that dimension by mystics, painters, dancers, musicians and so on.

At any rate, the present social system is totally opposed to all such approaches. The taboo on knowing 'who you are' is necessary since it is opposed to the notion of a person. The system we live in is a personality-oriented one; it encourages the intrinsic existence of the little 'self' or ego; that name and form is an undeniable truth, a solid something that is 'real'. All civilized societies encourage this 'fact' of a person, and build institutions, write histories of their past, build memorial stones and erect monumental institutions within this framework. Even the idea of sacrificing the 'ego' or person for a larger concept, as a tribe or nation, symbolised, by a flag or other images is an enhancement of the same notion since it involves the sacrifice of the 'personal self', the ego. All dualistic conditioning inherently involves the notion of a 'self' and 'others' as real and separate entities, as given. This fundamental basis of a 'subject' and 'object' dichotomy is on what entire civilizations have been created. Given this situation, can conditioned individuals of this dualistic system even 'see' a dimension that is beyond all this? Will they not resist, since it takes away the very grounds on which this self or their social system is standing? A linear or split-mind cannot even allow or see the whole, for it is beyond concepts. The 'Self' or 'I' concept can only project concepts. Wholeness demands the total abandonment of all such current notions, a negation of all that is. However, there is also a stage when the conceptual level of an intellectual understanding within dualism is reached whereby one may be ready to take off like reptiles flying into the sky leaving no traces of the steps taken in *Ākāśa*, in space, yet beyond space, as territorial attachment in a sense. But this taking off is only a beginning, journey into the fourth dimension where the ladder has been removed, where there is no turning back or going down again.

Again, such understanding or apperception of wholeness, is not 'objective'—my understanding is valueless to you. It cannot be transferred or transmitted to you. It can only be pointed out. Phenomenally, dualistically, one may be led within 'sight' but only you can 'see' it. Even this is a metaphorical statement since truth cannot be 'seen'. In fact, trying to look, or see is itself false, for there is nothing to 'see' even in the right direction. And who is to 'see', since there is nobody there? Discouraging, pessimistic?

The literal meaning of words as space—*ākāśa*, is varied and not easily expressive. We may, for instance, substitute these for the word meditation, or *dhyān*, or awareness—variously indicative of 'inner awareness', 'intuitive visions', 'spiritual awareness', and so on. But whether expressed by 'oriental or occidental' mystics, it does imply the cessation of any kind of mentation, implying a vivid state of consciousness free of all abiding discursive, mental activity by means of images, forms and figures that are produced imaginatively, as St. John of the Cross had put it. This is non-objective, impersonal awareness beyond words, or thought of the personal self. The self-nature which even Zen masters refer to is not the personal self but the subjective total mind in the non-dual sense; again, often referred to as 'one-mind', 'no-mind', etc. This is **in** the same sense that knowledge and wisdom are of a totally **different** order, such as that now action and spontaneity implies non-action which is labelled as ignorance or so from the split or linear mind's view-point. All that is needed is to decondition one's self, by waking up, by being conscious, for clarity to appear which always was there. Why is one unhappy? Because 99.9% of everything one thinks, and of everything one does, is for oneself— and, there isn't one.

The most serious handicap in understanding Space, *Ākāś*, etc. is to start on the wrong foot. This has become the most fatal step and the first step is the last step. That is why reading all of the ancient and modern wisdom of mystics is of no avail, since any statement is quickly subsumed into the conditioned dualistic notions—perhaps enthusiastically—which fits in like a personal patchwork. But not in a thousand million years will this produce an essential understanding that the urge is obliging us to seek. As busy bees we are adding to the stock, wasting time, for we are building that very *personna* whose illusory existence stands between our phenomenal solve and the truth of what we are, of which is what the urge in us is seeking. Even the 'laying down', 'renunciation' of everything that we consider as 'ours' which is 'ignorance'—even here the 'self' takes charge of the operation, successfully. The need is to strip oneself of all garments, for only in total nakedness will that come which we seek—the whole, the indivisible which is not 'ours', 'theirs', or a doctrine. As long as we do not perceive the fatuity of a phenomenon telling itself how marvellous it is, we will never come to the knowledge of that which we are and, when we have understood that, as phenomenon, we are not.

What is this Now, the total Present (no past, present, future of conceptual linear line)—this dimensionless point? That now has no duration, it is not horizontal. It has only contact with seriality, at right angles to it. Its measurement is within, in this timeless dimension so to speak. It is to another extension of time, it is eternally Present, in the Now, that allows for Creative Expression. This is what links us to the other three dimensions. It is the point at which time cuts across space and as a concept it is spatial rather than temporal. Yet, it is not a fleeting moment; for in it exist all things potentially and as manifestations which is time, i.e. *Sansāra;* from it—noumenon or Nirvanic dimension—everything is projected. It is the invisible portal through which intuition reaches us from that universal or limitless interior (spatially though of) which is all we ever were or will be, and which is 'out of time'. It is the sole line of communication between our enveloping totality or our apparent existence as separate individual creatures. The present alone in our experience is *what is*, and phenomenally it is not : for it is only an imaginary division in time between past and future. There are concepts that artificially divide a continuity in time and space. *Now* alone represents that we are in an apparent world in which we are not, since therein we are appearances—phenomenon only. We are nothing but as *the Present*, neither existing *Sansarically* nor not existing *Sansarically*.

The 'I' concept, the *personna* is like the clown in a circus who pretends to be the doer of all acts. As children we are aware of this and laugh at him, not taking the clown seriously. But as grown-ups we take the clown the 'I' concept as seriously—as if it 'does' or 'acts', or is responsible for everything. As innocent children having child-like quality—we knew better, although in both the cases we love the clown. All so-called volition is the 'I' concept's manifestation who seeks anything, enlightenment included ? Under the compulsion of the 'I' concept how could anything be realised except the enhancement of the 'I' concept? It wants even pseudo-understanding, pseudo-enlightenment by which 'I' can pose as a sage—for its own liquidation is not desirable. Thus every path, every analysis, every 'discipline' must lead us away from home. For, all action is of the 'I' concept; for there is no 'actor' really at all. The 'I' concept can do no service either, unless that concept disappears. When it does, that which we were is there all the time. This is the consequence of non-action—speaking in a dualistic language.

That dimensionless point, that Space, that *ākāśa* is the eternal Silence, more eloquent than words—yet from which words appear and into which they disappear. Silence is not a negation of noise, it is a stillness—'Be still and know that I am'—of the mind, away from thoughts, cerebration and the like that all act as barriers to knowing our true nature. Is there even a split-second when we are still, without thoughts that are constantly there as chatter, as surface waves of consciousness ? The space between thoughts—infinitesimal from the split-minds viewpoint—is an indication of that space. It's a duration, beyond duration, since in itself it is intemporal and infinite. It is that background against which all happens, the experience of time and its accessories. That is the Space, the Reality—the screen on which the ever moving pictures of conceptual life are projected. Knowing this, its incalculable potency becomes apparent for this is no other than whole-mind.

In other words, birth is the birth of the 'I' concept, and death its death. This is what projects the world, for without it there is neither birth nor death. Similarly, 'without', 'within', 'above', 'below' arises out of this 'I' concept, of thoughts of a split-mind. There is no resolution of those opposites, for this attempt is of the same nature, of the aggregate of latent tendencies held together by the 'I' concept. How do we know all this, ephemeral nature, this transitoriness, this phenomenon? Because who we are is this stillness, this spaceless-timeless Present, this continuum of consciousness wherein is the absence of 'I' concept—for then only is there true humility, truly spontaneous. For that which is, that we are—comes forth naturally *Karma* and reincarnation are also the creations of the 'I' concept, as also 'mind', 'matter'—words for a continuum in which consciousness is the only Subjectivity, all else being objects or concepts.

Thus, there is nothing to be acquired, only the error is to be exposed. Perhaps, the readjustment to 180° turnabout that we take is to give up the old addiction, the disease of thinking as an 'I' concept, that I am a body, a mind, a word, etc. We do need a giving up of the old ways. I is not only that we have to give up the 'I' concept but also the 'giving-up' since with it goes the reality of the cosmos, that never has been or could be, only the whole-mind can reveal this as direct cognition which makes it very obvious.

The whole-mind is Silence, beyond opposites and comparisons; it is what may be called the 'Witness' of Vedanta, Buddha-mind of Zen, Father of Christianity. It is to escape the pendulum movement of a dualistic mind, going tic-toc, tic-toc; the interval is what we need, to avert this movement. This is to be aware, to be awakened instantly—not though to be likened to any sensorial perception. The whole-mind continues to know the divided-mind which it considers as an aberration. But we all know it in our daily life as the consciousness which is aware of it all, ever present, ever awake—except when it misidentifies with what it sees. It is that quality of 'Seeing'—where there is neither the seer nor is there the seen; that is the illusion: that is the splitting into subjectivity and objectivity—only the Universal Presence knows this. Call it void space, *ākāśa* or whatever label—for conceptual language can only point in the right direction of, who am I?

I am (is) pure consciousness, I am (is) Love itself, I neither *knows* consciousness nor *knows* love for that creates duality, since the 'I' concept intervenes creating things, imaginary entitles. *Sat, chit, anand*, being consciousness—what these labels represent are not things. Through the false, the untruths—as 'education'—that

078103

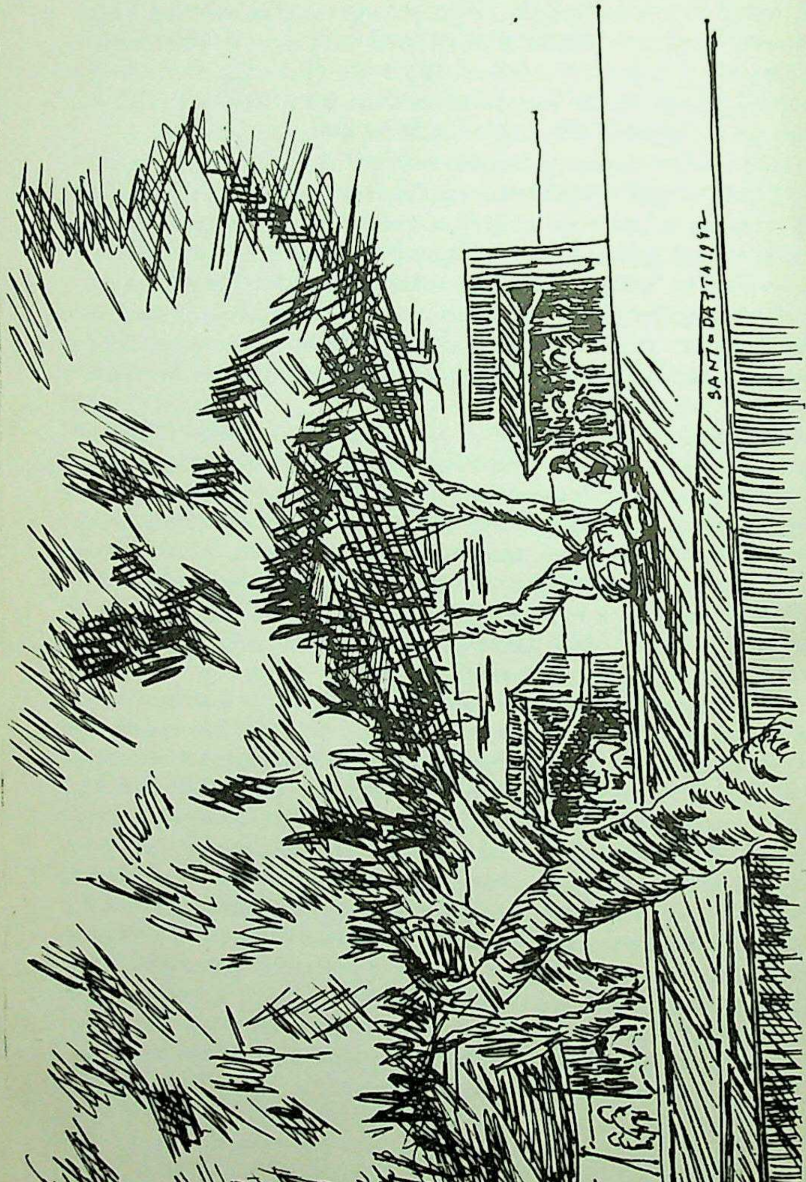
which is, is laid here. Were all individuals to lose the 'I' concept, the notion of a separate-self, automatically nothing deriving from it would remain, i.e. pride, greed, envy, ambition, etc.? While today a minority is like this, what a difference it would make it to whatever degree we can succeed in weakening its hold—of 'self', to that extent there will be Space for integrated life on earth.

The Universal Presence knows no self or 'I'. Here the impersonality of pure consciousness, inaccessible to the process of identification, represents the plenitude of the void, space, the one-mind. In other words, since pure consciousness is, what is, nothing else is—so I am not. There is only it, unknown to itself. Nor can it be, for there is nothing. That is why it is called the void, since there is no one to be. And the Universal Presence is at the same time Universal Absence, for there is nothing to be present and nowhere for a presence to be.

Perceiving in itself is pure consciousness, neither the perceiver, nor that which is perceived. Perceiving, witnessing, is the manifestation of pure consciousness. The rest are all concepts and interpretations. This has to be understood as an insight by the non-mind, an impersonal non-entity. And whosoever is conscious of this, is this and nothing else in that eternal Now, Space, Silence. All else, in time, is unreal. Knowing understanding this, abolishes one, the dream would vanish, and only non-manifestation—timeless, spaceless, the immutable remain.

For one who knows this, while his body flows horizontal in the stream of time like the rest of mankind, his mind has acquired the vertical dimension at right angles from each moment of time-river. He is beyond the tic-toc, action-reaction, cause-effect of *Karma*, of circumstances. Vertical vision is a consequence, not a method. He lives in the Eternal Silence, that space beyond words—inner or outer—which we take for granted in civilized societies where it is believed that anything can take place because of mere chatter, verbiage—a primary occupation. But in order to be 'spaced out' this chatter is the biggest barrier, greatest hinderance to the development of man's spiritual possibilities.

> When he opens his mouth he is lost, when he seals his mouth he is lost. If he does not open it, if he does not seal it, he is 108,000 miles from truth.
>
> *Another Chinese Saying*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Parallel Structures

Jyotindra Jain

We* are familiar with the fact that the Brahmanic temple is an embodiment of some of the cosmological and mythological ideas of an ancient cultural tradition. It is not that the concept of the Brahmanic temple developed in isolation as the creative expression of an individual architect. It is rather that innumerable currents of beliefs and practices interacting with one another over a large span of time and space have flowed into the creation of a multitude of architectural forms and that the Brahmanic temple is only one of these expressions.

On the other hand traditional Indian tribal and village architecture which may appear to be purely functional and utilitarian to us on the surface is in reality not so mundane. The traditional dwelling of several of these communities at one level fulfilled the day-to-day functions of the 'kitchen', 'bedroom', 'living-room', 'pen-place' and 'courtyard', but at another level represented a whole universe packed with beliefs and ritual practices, mythological and symbolic meanings, archaic customs and memories. The traditional dwelling, in this sense, becomes a symbolic replica of the cosmic structure of spaces representing the worlds of men, gods and ancestors—communion among them being governed by the cycle of daily and yearly rituals.

This paper is an attempt to excavate the cosmological and mythological layers underlying the 'Euclidean geometry' of some Indian tribal and village dwellings and settlements and thereby identify a 'stratigraphy' which is normally not perceived by the bare eye.

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A study of several tribal dwellings of northern and eastern India points to the fact that they are simultaneously abodes for men, gods and deceased ancestors. These three categories correspond to the earth (men), the heaven (gods), and the netherworlds (ancestors) of the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmology—though not consciously conceived as such a system by the tribal communities.

Man is in continuous interaction with the gods and deceased ancestors whose physical manifestations are the various symbolic elements and sacred spaces of the dwelling and its surroundings. Deified ancestors differ from gods in that the former are mainly family deities, whereas the latter are venerated by the entire village or community. Let us examine how the spaces and architectural elements of the dwelling relate to various gods and ancestors. To begin with, take the dwelling of the Rathva and Bhilala tribes of the border area of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh (Chhota Udepur/ Alirajpur region).

The main wall of the verandah that divides it from the kitchen is sacred to such deities as Ind, Pithoro, as well as those related to their myth of creation. These deities are installed in the wall by means of colourful paintings. The side-walls are reserved for depiction of ghosts and deified ancestors. These paintings by themselves represent the entire cosmos and the myth of creation of the Rathvas and Bhilalas. Through a ceremony of invocation, the deities are invited to descend into the paintings and take shelter therein.

In times of crisis such as failure of the harvest, disease, loss of cattle or property, the deities living in the wall-paintings are invoked and consulted. At the time of the invocation ceremony, the space of the verandah — where the inhabitants normally relax, smoke a hukkah, pound grain, chat with guests or sit and drink—is converted into an area of the otherworld of their cosmology, where the deities descend, receive sacrifices and converse with the family members.

The Saoras of Orissa too have a similar practice. On one of the mud-plastered walls, a square or rectangular enclosure is drawn with a twig dipped in rice-paste. This enclosure is known as the 'house' of the gods. Inside the enclosure, a whole universe comprising gods, men, animals and vegetation is depicted. The deities are invoked to come and reside in the 'house' in the following words : "I have made a house for you. Here are your elephants and horses. Come riding on them. Come and see what a fine house I have made for you. Deities of the sky, come and see the house. Deities of the hills, come and see the house...."

Once the gods painted inside the enclosure are invoked and offerings made to them, they descend into their 'house' and live there.

On ceremonial occasions, the family places offerings before them and the deities in return protect the family. In this case the use of the word 'house' for the painted sacred enclosure clearly signifies the presence of a 'house' within a house — one representing the iconographic strata and the other the functional.

The Rathvas, the Bhilalas as well as several other tribal communities of central and western India hold the 'central pole' of the house as one of the most important ritual elements. Here the ridge-piece rests on several supporting posts of which one is considered to be the 'central pole' of the house. However, it is not situated in the actual centre of the house but marks the last third of the central axis. This pole is the seat of *gotar devi* or the clan goddess whose installation here is represented by vermilion dots. The kitchen wall which is sacred to the same goddess is by virtue of the fact that this pole intercepts the wall on the kitchen side. During the marriage ceremony, offerings are made to *gotar devi* in the house of the bride as well as the bridegroom. The central pole is also sacred to deceased ancestors and at its base are placed offerings of rice, chickens or a goat, on such festive occasions as *Divaso* and *Divali.* At the time of laying the foundation, the owner of the house ritually places a coin into the hole for the central pole. This practice brings to mind the immense significance of the axis mundi of Hindu, and particularly Buddhist, sacred architecture.

Among the Barelas of the Satpura Hills, a small post called *ginjri* in installed in the kitchen in honour of *kul devi.* Here the actual central pole has no cultic significance. The Jhabua Bhils of Barwani region of Madhya Pradesh erect a piece of teak wood near the hearth to venerate their *kul devi.*

The dwelling of the Kondhs of Phulbani and Koraput districts of Orissa is amply inhabited by various spirits and deities. The western corner of the sleeping room is sacred to Sita Penu, the goddess of harvest represented by a dry gourd filled with seeds hanging from the ceiling. It is interesting to note here that in the Rigveda Sita is invoked as presiding over agriculture or the fruits of the earth.

Danda Penu, the Kondh goddess of graneries presides inside a small post in the sleeping room. Every post of the Kondh house is the seat of one deity or the other.

The kitchen is considered to be one of the most sacred places among many tribal communities. The Rathvas and the Bhilalas install their clan goddess on the back of the main painted wall in the kitchen. The hearth itself symbolises the deity Akhado Baman, the eldest brother of god Ind.

When the house is ready, the chief woman of the family makes two horseshoe-shaped mud *chulhas* or ovens. The deities of the hearth are invoked and installed in them by the *badvo*, the main religious practitioner. Offerings of rice, chickens and *urad*-grain cakes are cooked. The *badvo* then invokes various deities and puts five vermilion dots on the back of the oven on the right side.

Among the Bhils of Rajpipla and West Khandesh, as the bride enters the house of the bridegroom, she is ceremoniously led to the hearth for its worship. And among the Balahi weavers of Nimar District of Madhya Pradesh, the head of the family dips his palms in rice-paste and puts their impressions on the kitchen wall to personify the deities of the hearth.

The grain storage jars of the Rathvas are the abodes of Anniraya, the god of foodgrains. These jars are placed in one corner of the kitchen, entry to which is restricted, since it harbours such powerful deities.

The dwelling of the Pardhans of the Upper Narbada Valley consists of three structures. The main one is called the *deoghar* (house of gods) which also contains the kitchen. Two grain storage jars are kept before the fireplace to prevent undesired entry to it. Among most of these communities, where the kitchen is considered a sacred place, it has the function of bestowing fertility and wealth. For this reason among the Pardhans, when the eldest son is married, the parents let the newly-married couple live in the deoghar while they themselves sleep in one of the side structures. The Pardhans' family wealth is also buried in the deoghar.

The Gonds and Bhumias of eastern Mandla (Madhya Pradesh) worship *dulha deo* (the bridegroom god) who is supposed to reside near the hearth in each house. Every third or fourth year the head of the family sacrifices a red or black chicken to the god who in turn protects the family from snakes and tigers.

The house is as much a shelter for the deceased ancestors as for their descendants. Among the Bhangi, Dhedh, Vaghri and Ravalia castes of Gujarat it is customary to have in the house a miniature underground chamber dedicated to the ancestors. This author witnessed in a village in Saurashtra a ritual of blood sacrifice, at which a piece of meat of the sacrificial victim was offered to the deceased ancestor residing in the chamber. Interestingly enough, this evokes comparison with baliharana or the ritual of throwing oblations on the ground for the household gods as described in the Grihyasutras.

In the dwelling of the Pauri Bhuinyas of Keonjhar and Sunderghat districts a narrow passage from the hearth leads to a small and secluded apartment called *bhitar* which serves as the abode of the deceased ancestors and spirits. Often it happens that the entire settlement comprises families belonging to a single lineage. In such cases there is only one ancestral apartment or *bhitar* for all the families as they are descendants of common ancestors. The house that contains *bhitar* is known as *mūlaghar* (i.e. the main, basic or essential house) in contrast to other ordinary houses known as *melaghar*. Both the hearth and the *bhitar* are considered so sacred that no outsider is permitted an entry to them. The hearth is the link between the deceased ancestors and their living descendants, because the food cooked here is supplied to both. If any unauthorised persons cross the hearth and enter the *bhitar*, then there is a danger of the enraged ancestors relinquishing the house. The sanctity of the place is so much that even on the roof of the *mūlaghar* clothes cannot be spread out for drying. The use of the words *bhitar* and *mūla* which indicate "the inner" and "the premordial" respectively, evokes comparison with the brahmanic concept of *garbhagṛha* or the "inner embryonic chamber" of the temple where the deity is installed.

Another deity of the pantheon residing in the house of the Rathvas and Bhilalas is Jhampa-Tota, the god protecting the entrance. That is where he is installed and where he receives blood sacrifices from time to time. The gods who protect the cattle of the Rathvas against wild animals or disease are called Bhehanto and Kohajo. The pen-place, an integral part of their dwelling, is their abode.

The space in front of the Rathva and Bhilala house is sacred to Babo Ind (comparable to Vedic Indra) who ensures a rich harvest. Branches of particular species of trees are ritually cut and replanted in front of the house where, along with a plough, deities related to fertility are worshipped with offerings. The tribal ritual known as *Ind Karvo* is comparable in many respects to the Brahmanic festival of Indramaha.

The Rathva and Bhilala dwelling does not exist in isolation but forms part of a greater cosmic scheme of the tribal world view. Adjacent to the house is the field, where Khetarpal, the field-deity, takes shelter. Hedha Jatar or the goddess of the fence is provided an abode on the uncultivated strip of land along the fence. Beyond the hamlet is the entrance to the village, where the protector of the village, *jhampa-tota*, is housed. The periphery of the village is known as 'him' which is occupied by the goddess Himodi, to whom terracotta tigers are offered. Malon is a wide, protected green patch near the village which is thickly forested with large trees. These trees, by convention, are not to be cut by anybody. Malon contains the main village shrine. Under some of its trees deities in the form of carved wooden images, or khunta, wooden poles, are installed. These are periodically venerated through offerings of terracotta animals and dhapo, dome-shaped miniature terracotta shrines. Gamdeo or the village god is also installed here.

The iconographic and symbolic significances in various tribal dwellings and settlements clearly reveal the deeper meaning underlying the physical structures and spaces. There is no firm dividing line between terrestrial and cosmic space because the tribal universe itself remains whole and unfragmented.*

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* Information in this article is based on the writings of V. Elwin, J. Haekel, W. Koppers, T.B. Naik, S. Fuchs, S.R. Hivale, J. Gonda, N. Patnaik, Almas Ali, S.P. Rout and K.B. Debi.

Celebrating the Victory

Kalindi Charan Panigrahi

'Here you are, Manik', Mukund called out, barging into the house. 'Now boil these and stir up a good brew.'

'How much water do I put?' Manik enquired as she took the bundle of dry roots from her brother.

'Not much, I suppose. Half a seer should do. But remember to take it off the fire before the water turns purple. Give father a cup at regular intervals. Oh well, that reminds me, keep this lump of sugar with you. If he complains of thirst, give him a little drink.'

'What did Nidhi Maikap say? Father will get well, won't he?' The words seemed to tumble out of her lips with the greatest effort. Undernourished, thin as a stick, pushing fifteen, she looked like a child of eight or nine.

'Of course, he will. Do you think I'd be running around like this if there wasn't a ghost of a chance for him? Old Nidhi Maikap, he was thrilled when I handed him his full fees of eight annas, you know. "Don't you worry, son," the quack chortled. "This is a very potent concoction I'm giving. If your old Pa doesn't sit up like a hale and hearty bear the first thing tomorrow morning then my name's not Nidhi Maikap." The old bluffer. But listen, Manik, he said father must have a little gruel from tomorrow. We will need some old paddy for that. We can't be having a grain at home, have we?'

Manik stopped in her tracks. She didn't know where in the godforsaken village she could borrow or buy a measure of old paddy. Even if somebody did have a little of it stowed away, he wouldn't part with it for anything in the world, no matter how hard you banged your head against his door.

'Never mind', said Mukund, wearily. 'We'll see. Go prepare the brew.'

Indian Horizons Vol. XXXVI Nos. 1-2, 1987

Nothing was cooked since the night before and the embers had died in the mud oven. Manik pulled a handful of straw from the thatch, twisted it into a wisp, and went out to borrow fire from the neighbour.

Mukund tiptoed into the small dingy room where his sick old father Guna Parida lay dying. Six months had passed since his taking to his bed. Meanwhile his wife and two young sons had passed away, all inside of eight days, bloating up horribly before death. God alone knew what disease it was, but it took a heavy toll in the countryside, thousands of people meekly succumbing to it. Man is born to die they say, Mukund thought. Sooner or later. So how does it matter? But this bland philosophizing irked him. May be his people would have scraped through with medicines in time. But then where was the money? The little that he had was barely enough for buying rice for the sick.

Guna raised his withered hand and signed him to sit down. Mukund slumped to the ground by his father's side. 'Don't you worry, my son,' said Guna, with a groan. 'Just you wait and see, I'll pull through.' Hope welled up in Mukund's heart. Yes, why not, he thought. Didn't old Maikap say the new medicine will work like the devil? A sigh escaped him. He had been able to do precious little for his mother and brothers. They had dropped dead before he could get the hang of it. But he couldn't let his father go the same way.

Guna Parida's four acres had now shrunk into a small holding and the produce was barely enough for the family. But Guna couldn't have helped it. He had to sell away, like most others, chunks of his land in order to survive. Rain had been unkind for two years in a row, and, as if that was not enough, the wartime government declared Orissa a surplus state, squeezed the peasantry dry in its procurement drive, sold off the entire rice stock beyond the borders, triggering off the famine.

'Uma?' Guna stammered, staring blankly at his son. Obviously, his mind was wandering.

Mukund winced like the flare of a match. In the infancy of the famine Guna Parida's eldest daughter Uma was ditched by her husband, and, not to be outdone as it were, she deserted her children and ran off with somebody, sullying the name of the family. Tongues wagged; some said she made straight for the poorhouse, others said she became a whore. The incident left there indelible lines of shame and mortification in poor old Guna's heart. Why didn't the bitch drop dead before besmirching the family? Mukund thought bitterly. Couldn't she find a drop of poison to put an end to her shameful life? Starvation and disease took so many, why not her? Mukund always walked off from the place where her name was taken. Were his father well, he wouldn't have hesitated to give him a piece of his mind. 'Is the brew ready?' he called out to Manik, purposely ignoring the old man.

'In a moment,' replied Manik. She came in with a chipped stone bowl.

Guna took a tiny sip with the greatest difficulty and shook his head. She set the bowl on the floor near his pillow and left.

Outside the dusk fell. Clouds had thickened in the sky since afternoon and now a pitiful drizzle started. The month of Shravan was on its way out and there hadn't been a single good shower. Manik went into the kitchen and found herself a clean white rag, rolled it into a wick, rubbed it against the bottom of an earthen bowl that had last seen oil ages ago. Kerosene was the first thing to vanish from the wartime market.

'Anything left in the bowls, girl?' Mukund asked with an exaggerated casualness.

'What!' A brief smile sprung to his sister's face which looked like a withered bud. 'Oh yes, there's a little marua rice porridge from yesterday.'

'Good. Eat it up, you. Tonight is your turn to keep a watch over father.'

'But, brother, you have nothing in your stomach since day before yesterday.'

'Come on, you don't remember the porridge you prepared day before yesterday, do you? Well, who ate most of it if I didn't?'

Manik recalled having cooked a little porridge. She had also prepared a strange, outlandish curry out of three-day-old rice-water and yam leaves. 'But I'm sure you didn't touch any of it,' she ventured with trepidation.

'Who says?' Mukund said, rolling his large eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. 'Sister, you my guardian, eh? Do I have to eat, shit, sleep, do everything under your nose or what? If I told you I've eaten, then I've eaten, and that's all there is to it.' He was the hope of the family, he had overheard his parents discussing him, he was the bread-winner. Pushing nineteen, he was a strapping lad, and ever since his father took to his bed, single-handed he had looked after the land, ploughing, digging and watering, with a vengeance. In happier circumstances I'd have married by now, he thought, a rueful smile wrinkling his face. Ma had greatly looked forward to it. But she's long dead and gone and now father looks like going. Why should I let this slip of a girl boss over me? 'Watch what you say when I ask you to do anything, you goose. Who suffers from thirteen diseases in twelve months, little mother?' He tried to sound as gruff as a family patriarch. 'Have you seen yourself in the mirror lately? You're so thin that a whiff of breeze will fell you. And you bother what I eat, ha! Us men, we take a nibble whenever we can, of whatever we can lay our hands on, from puffed rice to flattened rice. But look at you. You said you had a bite this morning, didn't you? Let's ask anyone to take a look at the two of us and guess which one is starving. You know something, poor Ghania is yet to recover from the pain of last year, so hard did I pin him down to the ground. Bagudi competition of raja festival is something that I really enjoy. Now you better stop yapping and do what I tell you.' Marua rice from yesterday, he mulled with a sigh. It must have nicely fomented by now. But I mustn't wolf it down. I must wait. Maybe Manik will keep a little of it from tomorrow and cook it with a handful of broken rice and both of us can have a helping.

The sick man groaned hoarsely. The brother and sister hurried inside and propped him up against the wall. He had messed himself. Manik fetched a rag and water and cleaned him. Then she lit the wick in a shard of oil and brought a bowl of sugar water. Guna refused to have more than a gulp.

They came out of the room. Mukund lifted a pitcher of water and poured it down his throat. 'I had some puffed rice, you know', he said with a snort of laughter, forcing a belch. 'It can make you damn thirsty, puffed rice can. I say, there's nothing as good as water. Hungry or thirsty, a bellyful of it takes care of everything. Sister, go and have the marua rice before it gets uneatable.'

She tucked into the stale porridge without another word, 'You know something, brother,' she said, licking the bowl. 'The Jenas have hot rice twice a day.'

Mukund worked up another big belch. 'Oh, don't you be a glut, girl. So what if they eat hot rice twice a day? You want to beg or what? Listen, I'm Guna Parida's son. Begging is not in our blood. We ate hot rice as long as we could. It's only since the last one month or so....' He paused a while and added, 'Just you wait till father recovers. You will tell me if we don't have nice hot rice every second day. But if you think you can't wait longer, then the doors of the flophouse are wide ajar for you. Already one sister has blackened our face. You could join her there. Quite a few known faces you would see there, I'm sure.'

'Shut up, will you?' Manik cried. 'Why do you fly into a temper when I tell you any little thing? I'm sick of your harangues.'

'Who told you to bring up the Jenas? Remember, the stale cold watered rice of your home is hundred times better than the sweet milk-porridge of somebody else's. What business is it of ours to know what others eat?'

'Have you finished?'

'All right. Run along to bed. I will watch father for the first half of the night. Sleep has gone out of my eyes. I'll wake you up when I get tired.'

Manik left. Why do I take it out on the poor child? Mukund mused. Isn't it quite natural that she should long for a bowl of hot rice? I can manage without food for three or four days at a stretch, that's nothing special for a man, scores of my friends are in the same boat if not worse. That reminds me, a little gruel has to be cooked tomorrow morning for father. Where does one get a measure of old paddy? Do I have to run to Banchha Sahu of Nuapara once again? Sahu had given him an advance of five rupees against future wages, but Mukund had not been able to put in even a day's work because of the deaths in the family. He could not now show his face at Sahu's and ask him for another advance. He toyed briefly with the idea of approaching the Jenas. But why waste breath? He thought. There would be nothing but a no from those quarters. When mother lay dying I went and begged and begged and begged for a lump of sugar, but the old Jena was as cold as stone. Damn me if I knock on his door a second time. He recalled somebody mentioning Sadhu Panda of Manijangha and resolved to try his luck there. 'Manik, are you asleep?' he said, 'Bring me the money bag from the wall-hole'.

Manik brought him a small bundle wrapped in rags. He opened it and took out the money. Two crinkled one-rupee notes and a handful of small change. That was all that was left of the advance. 'All right,' he said, handing Manik the notes. 'Put these away in the hole and shut the mouth with the coconut shell lid securely. If rats or white ants get at them we will be done for. I will take these nine annas and go to Manijangha tomorrow morning. Boy, a good four miles up and a good four down. And a big river of mud to wade through twice besides. Of course, I'll run faster than my legs can carry me. Father must have a little something in his stomach tomorrow.'

'God knows when you'll return,' his sister sighed. 'The last time you went out to buy paddy you took the whole day and bought no more than a rupee's.'

'That was different. You are talking about the rations, sister. You know something, there were men who stood in the queue for three days and returned home empty-handed. You ought to have seen the mile-long line to believe it. The distribution was slow and the crocodile crawled a foot an hour, and you received your quota only when your turn came, no one let you bust the queue. Don't ask me how I managed. Anyway, all that is over now. The government has refused to distribute further. It's different with Sadhu Panda. No hassles. Throw cash and buy rice and hit the road back home. By the way, tomorrow morning you are not going to the swamps to collect marua rice. I want you to sit up with father.' Of late Manik had taken to visiting the swamps with a wicker basket to collect marua rice from the weeds. Not she alone. Knots of women and children, hungry, emaciated, fierce, made a beeline for it, some of them leaving bed at ungodly hours to have a head start. Pausa had come and gone and the measly harvest—the third in a row—had not even been enough to satisfy the demands of the landlords. People relied heavily on the bounties of the seasons: raw mangoes and yams in summer; fishes and snails in the rainy months; an assorted variety of spinachs and leaves in and out of season; and now before the advent of winter, marua rice. The swamps, mist overhanging them, presented a unique sight: waves of human beings billowing around the place, revealing a hand here, a bare back there. Heads bobbed, wicker baskets seemed to swing in the void.

Manik spread the end of her sari and lay down, curling up like a dog. But sleep wouldn't come to Mukund's eyes. He was lost in his thoughts. My poor little sister is such a pathetic rattle of bones and yet she drags herself every morning to the swamps. And I can do nothing about it. I fail to go for work just for a few weeks and want has hemmed me in from all sides. Will I be able to save father? Will I be able to save Manik?

When Manik awoke before cockcrow next morning, she found her brother gone. She had a fever coming on, her body ached and her head felt heavy as a stone, This was nothing new; she had fevers off and on ever since last summer. She never breathed a word of it to Mukund.

She heard her father stirring in his bed. She raised herself and went to him. She washed his face with water, wiped it dry with her sari-end and said, 'Shall I get you a bowl of sweetened water?' Guna's eyes had sunk into their holes. With the greatest effort he raised his hand and put it on his daughter's head. His lips trembled, but no words would come out of it. 'Brother has gone to buy rice for gruel,' Manik said. 'He will be back any moment now.'

It was high noon when Mukund bought two measures of rice and started his trudge back home. The road lengthened ahead of him. He crossed the river where it was at its narrowest and the mud came up to his waist. Finally, he reached the outskirts of his village and lowered himself into a ditch to wash.

'That can wait,' said someone. 'But not your father. Run along home.'

Mukund swivelled around. It was Ghania. Was the fellow being spiteful? he wondered. 'Bluffing, boy?' he said.

'Go and find out for yourself,' said Ghania, pushing and prodding a throng of rickety cattle towards the gray grassless pastures.

'Brother, do you still hold it against me, that silly game of bagudi?' Mukund asked. 'All right, I admit the fault was mine, there. Forget the old grudges.'

'Run along, brother', said Ghania, twisting the tail of an old cow. 'You're wasting your breath.'

Mukund's hands and legs went dead. The sky seemed to collapse on his head, the ground sank under his feet. Fighting off the daze, he broke into a run. The breeze carried Manik's heart-bursting sobs. He threw the bag down and slumped to the ground.

It came in handy for his father's shraddha ceremony, the paddy. He engaged a priest and performed all the rites, although in those hard times no one could fault him for negligence, and blew one full rupee. He couldn't care less. His father was dead and along with him his hopes, his dreams. The wandering minstrels' songs over their doleful khanjani jarred on him. Life is a bloody maya, is it? he mused. Each passing day brought him more unhappiness.

Then one day he overheard the village schoolmaster discussing the war: 'Oh, don't you folks worry. It's going to be over pretty soon. Japan's buckling down. Wait and see if the prices don't fall soon. Rice will be available in abundance.' When? Mukund thought. Will I live to see it? Manik is fast sinking. How long can a young girl survive on a fistful of parched rice? How will she get back her strength without freshly-cooked rice in her shrivelled stomach?

All that was left of his money was a rupee. He decided to spend it all on rice. He could leave the entire quantity with Manik and go to work at Sahu's. This seemed the most sensible course. But where will I get rice to buy? he wondered. Who's going to sell a grain? There will be many a village to roam and many doors to knock. Never mind. Surely I can't let my little sister go to the poorhouse. The teacher said the war will be soon over. Then the prices will fall and the market will overflow with rice. It's just a matter of scraping through till then. He tightened the thread-bare towel round his waist as if in determination.

Next morning he set out early. Passing by the village cremation ground, his feet stopped. Heaps of bones littered the ground. Skulls rolled like pumpkins, teeth bared in hideous grins. The wind whistled through the empty ribcages. Somewhere in these heaps are the bones of my people, he thought. The bones of my mother and brothers. And now my father's. Soon I'll end up here, maybe. And little Manik, too. But the sweet wide old world will not stop, will it?

'Patra of Kusupur has hoarded mounds of rice in his underground vault,' said someone. Mukund looked up and found he had caught up with a small group of men and women hurrying along the dirt-tracks.

'Then let's try his place first,' said another.

'If this many of us make a beeline there he will shoo everyone away,' added a third.

Kusupur would have been definitely nearer home, but Mukund was disheartened. He turned his eyes in the direction of Manijangha, and his spirits quailed. Four long miles up and four longer miles down, to speak nothing of the river of mud. He took a long breath and plunged blindly ahead, picking out a beaten path that wound towards Manijangha.

Late in the afternoon, dead beat, he re-crossed the river with a sack of rice. His stomach rumbled and turned, his knees buckled, he wanted to throw up, and after every four paces he stopped to catch his breath. The sun broke through the ragged clouds and blazed down. He thought his skull would split open. The last stretch of paddy fields before the village cremation ground seemed vast and unending. The giant banyan on the edge of the village seemed a speck in the distance. He looked around and spotted a ditch. He ran there and gulped down a few mouthfuls. The muddy water stank. Things will look up from tomorrow, he thought, wiping his mouth. We will have at least one meal of steaming hot rice a day. Then, suddenly, before he knew what was happening, he retched. The sack rolled off his shoulder and he fell to the ground. He mustered the last dregs of his strength, lifted the sack to his head and got to his feet again. It's just these fields to cross, he thought. Just you scramble up the canalbank and you're almost home. He took a step. His legs caved in and a violent trembling seized him. The sack fell off his head. He wanted to throw up again and again, the nausea came in relentless waves. There was nobody in sight. A thin white whisp of a cloud passed, dropping four futile drops of rain. A breeze sprang up. Mukund opened his eyes and stared at his village. His strength was fast ebbing. Oh, no more walking for me, he sighed, no more worrying. His eyes smarted to tears. He closed them, laying his head against the sack.

The fieldhands brought the news to the village. Manik's fever dropped. She went to the fields. Tears had dried in her eyes. Her brother had left her a bag of rice.

That evening the village chowkidar strode into the village, breathless with excitement. 'Japan has surrendered,' he announced. 'We've won the war. Government desires that all celebrate the victory with proper pomp and show. So, folks, bedeck your doors with mango twigs and leaves. Sweets will be distributed to school children at the police station tomorrow morning.'

Mukund celebrated the victory no less than the rest, perhaps even better. This was his first chance to be carried on human shoulders and also his last.

(Translated from the Oriya by K.K. & Leelawati Mohapatra.)

SANTODATTA 1982

The Cat and the Minister

Krishan Chander

Shri Upadhayaya had never dreamt of becoming a Minister. An ordinary hakim, he had his medicine shop in a lane off Shahdara where he sold tonics, aphrodisiacs and all sorts of potions and concoctions for curing bodily ailments.

It so happened that the nephew of the Chief Minister who had a coal dump in Shri Upadhayaya's lane, fell ill with dysentery and was cured by Shri Upadhayaya. The nephew casually mentioned him to his uncle, the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister, a victim of chronic piles, had not been able to get rid of the disease in spite of protracted treatment. At the instance of the nephew Shri Upadhayaya took the Chief Minister under his charge and cured him within six months.

Well, Shri Upadhayaya was made. The Chief Minister appointed him his family physician and came to regard him as one of his own men. Soon his practice flourished. He shifted from his modest house into a spacious bungalow, installed a telephone, bought a car and opened an account in a bank. In other words, his friendship with the Chief Minister interrupted the even tenor of his life.

It is well known once a man of politics takes a fancy for someone, he never spares him. Shri Upadhayaya was no exception.

One morning the Chief Minister sent for him. "You're one of my own men," he said. "I would like you to take up the responsibilities of the Secretary of the Janata Mandal."

"Me?" Upadhayayaji shook his head. "I don't have the time for it," he said. "These days I'm engaged in evolving a new medicine from an amalgam of *drakshasava* and *mauhlam*. That is to say, I'm grafting the Unani system of medicine upon our Indian system. I'm watching the result."

The Chief Minister was duly impressed.

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"What'll the end product be?" he asked.

"I wish I knew," Upadhayayaji said.

"The medicine you are talking about – what is it supposed to cure?" The Chief Minister asked.

"About that, too, I'm in the dark," Upadhayayaji confessed. "The fact is that in the western system of medicine they first diagnose the diseases and then match the treatment for it. But in our system it's the other way round. We first evolve a medicine and then find out which disease it can cure."

"That settles it," the Chief Minister said. "You first take up the Secretaryship of the Janata Mandal and then we'll decide what duties to assign you."

And that was that. Shri Upadhayaya was installed as the Secretary of Janata Mandal.

Nobody objected. He was the Chief Minister's own man.

When the time for elections to the State Assembly approached, the Chief Minister again went into a huddle with Upadhayayaji.

"Upadhayayaji, the people are pleased with you", he said. "They are full of praise for what you have done for them."

Upadhayayaji looked surprised. "I've not set my foot in the Janata Mandal office even once!" he declared.

"That's precisely the reason why they like you so much," the Chief Minister said. "Now, listen, the election to the Assembly is upon us. You must contest a seat. File your nomination papers forthwith. You're one of our own men, you know. And...."

Upadhyayaji was dumbfounded.

"I'm very busy these days," he stammered. "My whole time is taken up in treating Shri Garmanath, the Joint Secretary of your Commerce Department."

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's suffering from something which his wife would feel ashamed to hear about. I leave it to you to guess."

The Chief Minister's eyes twinkled. "I hope you're taking good care of him" – he dropped his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

"I'm doing my best," Upadhayayaji said." "But I really don't quite know how to go about it. You see, he has to be treated with arsenic, and I'm not sure about the proper dose. It must kill the disease without killing the man. At present I am trying to determine the correct dose. It involves a lot of experimenting and that's what keeps me so busy."

"Life and death are in God's hands, but the elections are in our own hands." The Chief Minister yawned. "Don't dilly-dally. Stand for an Assembly seat. You're one of our own men...."

Shri Upadhayaya fell in with his wishes, stood for election and won. The Chief Minister got busy casting around for trusted men with whom to pack his Cabinet.His choice fell upon Upadhayayaji as his Health Minister and he also assigned him the Forest portfolio. Shri Upadhayaya was just the man for it, he thought. The forests abounded with all sorts of medicinal herbs and plants and Upadhayayaji was reluctant to assume the heavy responsibilities of a Minister and for very weighty reasons. His wife was pregnant again after having spawned eleven children and Upadhayayaji had to look after her. Besides, he was engaged in preparing a special medicine from pearls and other precious stones for a big industrialist. But the Chief Minister would not let him have his way. "Look", he said, "all the persons I've decided to include in my Cabinet are above sixty. And none of them is in sound health. They are all afflicted with one disease or another—palsy, asthma, colitis, high blood pressure and so on. I must have a medical man of my own choice to look after their health. I count you among my own men..."

Upadhayayaji had no way out and was pitchforked into a ministerial seat. But he was far from happy in his new role. In the first place he did not know the English language which was regarded as the *lingua franca* of the country. And to make matters worse, he was not very proficient in Hindi or Urdu either. So he had to leave the affairs of the State to the care of the Secretary of his Department and devoted his whole time in tending to the health of his fellow Ministers.

One afternoon Shri Upadhayaya was busy grinding some precious herbs and seeds in his mortar when the Chief Secretary barged into his room. "Please come," he said. "The Chief Minister wants to have a word with you. It's urgent." "Is it a heart attack?" Shri Upadhayayaji looked apprehensively at the Chief Secretary.

"No, no, it's not a heart attack."

"Then what is it?" Shri Upadhayaya asked. "I must know so that I may bring the correct medicine with me."

"He's not suffering from any disease," the Chief Secretary said with a slight edge to his voice. "It's some official work."

"Then why bother me?" Shri Upadhayaya was annoyed at being disturbed in his important work. "Send for Jatindra Nath Kundra, the Secretary of my department. He knows everything. My presence is not necessary. Can't you see I'm busy with my pestle and mortar?"

Upadhayayaji was reluctant but the Chief Secretary persisted and soon Upadhayayaji found himself in the Chief Minister's presence.

The Chief Minister looked at him intently. "The Ministry is in danger," he said in a grave voice.

"Whose Ministry—yours or mine?" Upadhayayaji asked.

"Our Ministry, damn it!" The Chief Minister said testily. "If you don't stand by me we are doomed."

Shri Upadhayaya folded his hands. "I'm at your service. Being your own man, if I don't stand by you in a time of crisis, of what use am I? Tell me that rascal's name—the man who's causing you trouble. I know many goondas of the city. A knife will flash in the air and...."

"No, no, Upadhayayaji," the Chief Minister cut him short. "Please try to understand. It's not a job for goondas. You'll have to do it yourself."

Upadhayayaji trembled with fear. "I've never handled a knife in all my life, much less taken a life," he said in a weak voice.

"You're a funny sort of a man," the Chief Minister said. "I'm not asking you to kill a man. I want to talk to you about an official matter. About National Savings in fact."

"National Savings?" Upadhayayaji looked blank.

"Yes, about National Savings," the Chief Minister repeated. "These days our Central Government is obsessed with it. Every month I'm getting frantic letters from New Delhi and trunk call after trunk call. They have threatened that if I don't bring about a reduction in Government spending they'll replace me by another Chief Minister."

"What's National Savings?" Upadhayayaji asked. He didn't have the ghost of an idea as to how a Government worked.

"It's quite simple," the Chief Minister said. "Reduce expenses—that is what it means. Spend five rupees where you are now spending ten. If ten men are now engaged on a public enterprise make do with two instead. This kind of rigmarole is called National Savings."

Shri Upadhayaya thought for a moment. "Why not reduce the salary of the Ministers?" he said brightly.

"That I have already done," the Chief Minister said. "Don't you know how much salary you're getting now? Anyway, we can't reduce our salaries any further."

"In that case you might as well get over the problem by reducing the number of Ministers." Shri Upadhayaya said, "I'll take the lead. I'm willing to submit my resignation."

The Chief Minister was amused. "Will reducing the number of Ministers by one make any difference?" he said.

"Well... well... I've fifteen senior officers in my Department," Upadhayayaji said, "Axe eight".

The Chief Minister shook his head. It'll create a lot of complications," he said.

"We can reduce the number of Superintendents," Shri Upadhayaya suggested. "We can chop them down from thirty to fifteen."

"That will only touch the fringe of the problem," the Chief Minister looked dubious. "You must go lower down the scale."

Shri Upadhayaya went further down. When he came to the clerical cadre, the Chief Minister looked hopefully at him. And when Upadhayayaji mentioned the peons, the Chief Minister positively beamed. "Now you're talking sense," he said. "We must be down-to-earth in our policies. In fact, learn to look at things from the level of the man in the street. Now do one thing. Go out on an official tour to study things for yourself. Go to Teen Tal. It's a quiet place for contemplation. As it is, other Ministers complain that unlike them you never go on frequent tours. It sets a bad example."

Shri Upadhayaya decided that he would go on a tour to Teen Tal.

Thakur Manwant Singh, the Chief Conservator of Forests, was an excellent shikári and an old hand at administration, dating back to the days of the British Raj. He received Upadhayayaji with great eclat. He threw a party for him at the Boat Club and compared him to the ancient Indian physicians, Charak and Sushrut. The Rani of Bandipur arranged a nautch programme in his honour and the Raja of Golmapur took him out fishing.

When the round of festivities was over, Shri Upadhayaya expressed a desire to inspect the jungles of the Terai. Thakur Manwant Singh, shrewd man that he was, secured an elephant from the Raja of Bansipur and took Upadhayayaji into the jungles in the right royal manner. During the British regime the Chief Conservator of Forests used to go out on inspection on an elephant placed at his disposal by the Government. But this privilege was withdrawn after independence on the plea of economy. Thakur Manwant Singh was very sore about it. He tried to have the facility restored and had once even approached the Chief Minister about it. But his request was not granted.

Shri Upadhayaya had no interest in shikar but Thakur Manwant Singh was mad about it. He spotted a leopard and raised his rifle. "Look, look!" Upadhayayaji cried out just then. "Stop, Stop!" Thakur Manwant Singh held his hand.

"Do you see that bush?" Upadhayayaji said. Warned, the leopard slinked away behind the bushes. Thakur Manwant Singh gnashed his teeth.

"Which one?" Thakur Manwant Singh asked, holding back his anger.

"The one with the golden flowers."

Upadhayayaji asked the elephant to be stopped and climbing down pulled out a fistful of leaves and tendrils from the earth and held them before Thakur Manwant Singh. "In the Prakrit language they call this pudikut, in Sanskrit they call it rupdikark and in Persian Bazkalila."

"It's only myrobalan!" Thakur Manwant Singh said, peeved. "Why do you give it such fantastic names?"

"Yes, a very useful thing." Upadhayayaji continued, ignoring Thakur Saheb's objection. Then he launched forth on a long description of the plant, enumerating its numerous uses. Thakur Saheb kept saying, "Yes, yes," till he dozed off.

Shri Upadhayaya spotted some other plants and was equally explicit about their uses. Thakur Saheb's patience was exhausted but he held his peace. He knew his manners when dealing with a Minister. Besides, to economise on words was itself a sort of national saving.

After a seven-day outing in the Terai forests, Shri Upadhayaya thought he had had enough of it and entrenched himself at Teen Tal. The trip had done some good to his health and he had collected a huge amount of medicinal plants in the bargain.

Upadhayayaji was pleased with Thakur Saheb.

"Thakur Saheb", he said. "I hope you're happy with your job. If you have any difficulties please let me know."

"I've only one small complaint to make," Thakur Saheb said. "You've seen the Terai forests for yourself and you know how dense they are. When I visit them I am put to a lot of inconvenience."

"But I didn't experience any inconveniene," Shri Upadhayayaji looked at Thakur Saheb in surprise.

"It's because you went there on an elephant." Thakur Saheb explained. "I had borrowed it for you from the Raja of Bansipur. I've to go out on inspection on horse-back. You know how dense the forests are. Without an elephant it's like going into the jaws of death."

"Why don't you go out on an elephant?" Shri Upadhayaya countered. "Surely, nobody stops you for using an elephant."

"But the Government doesn't provide me with one," Thakur Saheb replied. "And that's the whole trouble."

Shri Upadhayaya sat thinking for a while. "How much will an elephant cost?" he asked.

"About ten thousand", Thakur Saheb replied. "But luckily, the Raja of Bansipur is willing to part with his elephant for five thousand rupees. It's a good elephant, a real bargain."

"Then go ahead buy it," Upadhayayaji said. "I'll sanction the purchase."

Thakur Saheb had come prepared. He fished out a piece of paper from his pocket and made Upadhayayaji sign on the dotted line. He also gave Upadhayayaji his own pen, saving him the trouble of finding his own. The whole thing was over in less than a minute.

There now followed another round of parties, lasting for a week, which made Upadhayayaji forget the very purpose of his tour. On the last night of his stay he suddenly remembered why he had come to the place, and sweat broke out on his face. He hurriedly called Thakur Saheb on the phone and asked him to bring the list of employees in his Department. He must effect some national saving, he explained.

Thakur Saheb came with the list, Upadhayayaji scanned it, but could not make head or tail of it. "Please explain to me the whole thing verbally," he said at last. "And make it short. We must make an economy drive."

"You can dispense with my services if you like. I'm ready for it." Thakur Saheb said.

Upadhayayaji smiled. "What difference will one man make?" he asked. "That just won't do."

"I've two Deputy Conservators under me," Thakur Saheb said. "They look after six ranges each."

"Oh! that's a lot of work. We can't dispense with them," Upadhayayaji said.

"Please go down the list."

"Then I've four Assistant Deputy Conservators."

"Please go down the scale."

"Twelve Range Officers."

"Go further down."

"Eighteen Forest Officers."

"Still further down."

"Sixty forest guards."

"And who else?"

"Seven Record Clerks."

"Is that all?"

Then there's the cost of milk. Nine rupees per month."

Upadhayayaji sat up. "What's this milk for?" he asked.

"Huzoor our Record Office is infested with rodents." Thakur Saheb said. "They come from the nearby jungles and play havoc with our files. So we have officially kept a cat which protects the records from the ravages of these rodents. We spend nine rupees a month for its milk."

Upadhayayaji flared up. "When we have seven clerks to take care of the records what do we need a cat for?" He asked. "Nine rupees! I'm amazed, Thakur Saheb. The nation's good money is being squandered on a useless cat before your very eyes. No, I won't allow it! He paused for breath. The cat must be dismissed forthwith," he said in a decisive voice.

"Very well, Sir," Thakur Saheb said, gathering up the papers.

Suddenly a sound came from near the door. Upadhayayaji jumped in his chair.

"Meoow!" A cat was standing in the doorway, watching the Minister with inquisitive eyes.

(Translated from the original in Urdu by Jai Ratan)

Book Reviews

The Golden Gate by Vikram Seth, Random House, New York, 1986. 307 pages, $ 17.95.

To have written the "perfect book for the 1980's" may sound like a dubious achievement, but in the case of Vikram Seth's first novel, *The Golden Gate*, a publisher's blurb may for once approach accuracy. The thirty-four-year-old author, an Oxonian and a Stanford Ph.D. candidate in economics, has spun an up-to-date tale of San Francisco "Yuppiedom." He has done it, what is more, in verse, broadly modelling his book after the subject (young love) and the tone (mild bemusement) of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, and adopting that classic Russian poem's intricate form as well (iambic tetrametre sonnets).

Vikram Seth won the 1986 Commonwealth Poetry Prize for *The Golden Gate* and shared this prestigious literary award with Niya Osundare of Nigeria. He has written two other books: a travelogue about hitchhiking through western China, called *From Heaven Lake*, and a collection of poems, *The Humble Administrator's Garden*.

The Golden Gate has provoked considerable critical interest. It involves a complicated 14-line stanza with "a fiendish rhyme scheme". According to a critic, though "the scheme is strict and over-baubled, Vikram Seth achieves a startling flexibility of tone: grand set-pieces, swift dialogue, light parody, comedy and elegy." The book has five hundred and ninety-four stanzas, including one each for acknowledgements, dedication, table of contents, and a note about the author. The Pushkin stanza was designed more for speed than emotional content, and it is surprising how much Seth packs into it. The book's technical aplomb, pleasing wit, and general hustle very nearly conceal its melancholy. Separated from the elegance and ease of his verse, Seth's tale set in California of the 1980's sounds almost maudlin.

The story begins when John Brown, a successful twenty-six-year-old product of Berkeley and Silicon Valley, is nearly "brained" by a frisbee while walking through Golden Gate Park, and is thus with amusing improbability made to feel the loneliness of his emotion-dry, work-centred single life. His ex-girlfriend, Janet Hayakawa, a Japanese-American sculptress and part-time drummer in a rock band named Liquid Sheep, sympathetically takes out a personal ad in his name. Through this thoroughly contemporary contrivance, John meets and falls in love with Liz Dorati, a Stanford Law graduate. As they blissfully set up housekeeping, Liz's brother Ed, and John's best friend Phil, a young divorced father who has quit his Silicon Valley job to become a peace activist, also begin an affair. But Ed, deeply in thrall to traditional Christianity, raises religious objections to their love and Phil sadly gives him up. In a sudden twist, partly precipitated by the news that her mother is dying of cancer, Liz realises that her own relationship with the still emotionally rigid John cannot work and decides to marry the more easy going Phil, not out of "love" but out of "like", which both now believe is the more reliable emotion.

For his part, John is horrified and disgusted to learn of Phil's homosexual indulgence, and is further hurt and angered by Phil's and Liz's marriage. After a bitter spree of one-night stands and singles bars, he starts up again, promisingly if tentatively, with Janet, only to lose her in an automobile accident. While Phil and Liz care for their expanding family, which includes Phil's son, a child who survived the auto accident that killed Janet, and their own newborn baby boy. John is left aching and alone. But the book closes on a note of bittersweet possibility: now that he has learned of life's fragility, John may at last be ready to accept whatever love or friendship comes his way, on whatever terms.

More than one critic has conceded that, the feat of versification apart, the plot of *The Golden Gate* is slender, the characterisations sketchy and flat. It may be closer to the truth to say that, in the hands of a lesser artist than Pushkin, versification of this sort actually seems to encourage flatness and superficiality of a kind that would be intolerable in prose. But whatever the reason, *The Golden Gate* sports a slick emotional veneer such as one associates less with serious fiction than with a Hollywood film like *The Big Chill*, with a few greeting-card sentiments about love and friendship thrown in for good measure.

But its problems go deeper than this. Seth does not so much create characters round or flat, as grade them on a scale of prefabricated moral possibilities. As one critic remarked, apparently inadmiration, "the novel's ultimate morality is severe. Crucially it's the bisexual and idealistic Phil.... who quit his job at Datatronics to join the peace movement, who ends up favoured by fortune while priggish homophobic John emerges with his initial desolation intact." Characters are defined in terms of where they stand on the issues, with life's sweetest secrets yielding to those on the correct side of the correct causes.

Vikram Seth, who directly addresses the reader, can laugh at himself. He tells a book editor at a party that he is writing a novel in verse...." He turned yellow.

'How marvellously quaint,' he said,
And subsequently cut me dead,"

Two stanzas later, Seth says to us:

"How do I justify this stanza?
These feminine rhymes?
My wrinkled muse?
This whole passe extravaganza?

How can I (careless of time) use
The dusty bread moulds of Onegin
In the brave bakery of Reagan?
The leaves will surely fail to rise
Or else go stale, before my eyes.

The truth is, I can't justify it.
But as no shroud of critical terms
Can save my corpse from boring worms,
I may as well have fun and try it.
If it works, good; and if not, well
A theory won't postpone its knell."

Seth's views on writers and poets are revealing:

"A writer is a mere arthritic
Among these muscular Gods of Taste.
And as for that sad balanomange, a poet —
The world is hard; he ought to know it.
Drivelling in rhyme's all very well;
The question is, does spittle sell?"

As a formal device, Seth's versification is engaging, clever and responsive to the subject matter. The vocabulary is rich and varied, ranging as needed from the lofty, erudite and archaic, to the trendy and quotidian. The verse can be lyrically fresh or dramatically intense. Line groupings and sentence structure are handled flexibly and, when necessary to punctuate an idea or shape a point, ingeniously. If occasionally a rhyme seems forced, a word choice awkward, a metre strained, overall the language proves remarkably elastic and capable.

A perfect example of a contemplative mood reads:

Tonight a quilt of peace surrounds him.
He dreams of nothing. He is free

Of all volition. It astounds him
How little now the enmity
Of the crass world, its fickle illness
Impinges on his crypt of stillness.

Critics have responded to *The Golden Gate* with respect, affection and even gratitude, for what the poet John Hollander has called "a charmingly unique sort of minor masterpiece, a tour de force of the transcendence of the mere tour de force." Perhaps we ought to leave it there.

Jehanara Wasi

BOMBAY, MY BOMBAY—The Love Story of the City by Khwaja Ahmad abbas, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1987, 167 pages, Rs. 70/-

Khwaja Ahmad Abbas is a likable and honest man, sides with the downtrodden, pioneered in film-making when this was not a paying business in India, has lived 72 years and has seen history made in India.

From *Bombay, My Bombay*, his recent autobiography, Abbas seems never to have taken himself too seriously. He started work in Bombay on Rs. 50 a month in 1932. He learnt to be a reporter under the auspices of various people connected with *The Bombay Chronicle*—Ansar Harvani and later Syed Abdullah Brelvi, the Editer, and M.A. Basit who taught him how to write a humorous column. Presently, he compiled his weekly contributions into a book entitled *Not All Lies* and freelanced till he had saved Rs. 3,000 that he placed in the Travancore and Quilon Bank. With some of this money he invested in a typewriter. The bank failed. Abbas met Jawaharlal Nehru and offered to be his secretary free of charge. The offer was not accepted but the relationship endured.

Always left-wing and a fellow-traveller, Abbas saw Bombay and India through World War II. He records the Quit India Movement and the acquisition of a large number of left-wing friends, including Mulk Raj Anand and Balraj Sahni. With the latter's help, he saw a People's Theatre launched. He became a member of the Progressive Writers' Association, founded in 1935 and in the due course wrote a play called *Zubaidah*.

Abbas's theatrical and film ventures and stories of his wife are all interesting. "My wife," he says "lived in Shivaji Park with me through the worst communal riots that plagued Bombay—and the rest of the country," She had heart trouble. He took her to Moscow (where he had gone to help make *Pardesi*), and left her there in hospital when he returned to Bombay. She improved and came back by herself by Air India jet, was taken by

Abbas to Juhu, but was clearly still very ill. Abbas consulted Dr Baliga, "a friend more than a doctor", who advised that she should be operated upon by Dr Sen of the K.E.M. Hospital. Always sweet, gentle and devoted to her husband, she asked him to write her a "love letter" before she was wheeled into the operation theatre. He did so and she clung to it. She recovered from the operation but contracted pneumonia and, a month later, died, warning Abbas out of their common experience not to employ "stars" in his films. She is the most endearing character in a life fairly studded with characters.

What follows is a breathless report, a veritable marathon, on films undertaken on a shoestring budget, left either in mid-air unfinished or finished in the face of a multitude of obstacles, only to be poor box-office, though they were received well abroad. They included *Dharti Ke Lal*, *Rahi*, *Munna*, *Pardesi* and *Char Dil Char Rahen*. There are as many anecdotes as films attempted and they involved several people. Abbas travels from Bombay to Delhi, to Madras. He meets the dying Nehru whom he has consistently loved and finally returns to Bombay to write the great man's obituary for *Blitz*.

So the story wanders, frequently away from Bombay to Delhi, to Canada where Abbas meets several cousins who have settled in Alberta because "it is a good place to die". After he has won the President's Gold Medal for his film *Shehar Aur Sapna* and divided the spoils with his crew, he makes a movie with 13 naughty children in it—*Hamara Ghar*. He records lightly and without a trace of bitterness his curious experience with Amitabh Bachchan. He makes a film on Rajasthan, has brushes with death and discusses yoga. In the midst of his hectic life, he has another near-encounter with death through a paralytic stroke. And, as we might have expected, there is a graphic account of his confrontation with Doordarshan, that is an unfinished story.

At the end of his autobiography, we are convinced more than ever that Abbas is a kind, honest, light-hearted man, and that he takes himself for granted. To justify his title he contributes a final chapter on Bombay. He concludes with: "Christopher Mosley has said of each modern city including Bombay: 'All cities are mad, but their madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful, but the beauty is grim'.

Jehanara Wasi

The Circle of Reason by Amitav Ghosh, Roli Books International, New Delhi, 1986. 423 pages. Rs. 55/-

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro. Faber, London, 1986. 206 pages. £ 8.95

"The only thing I ever wanted to do was write a novel," says Amitav Ghosh, an academic and social anthropologist, whose travels in India, the Middle East and North Africa helped furnish material for *The Circle of Reason*. With his gift for wild narrative, Ghosh follows in the tradition of magical realists. "In fact there is nothing fantastic that happens in my book," he says in a recent interview. "Parts of it are deliberately realistic, almost a comedy of manners."

The Circle of Reason is a huge, ambitious novel with a crowd of characters and themes, set in a number of countries. The briskly paced narrative chronicles the tragicomic coming of age of Alu, a young Bengali orphan. From a small village in Bengal the story moves via Kerala to a fictitious state in the Middle East and reaches its denouement in the Sahara desert. Balaram, the eternal reformer, founder of the Pasteur School of Reason, Shombhu Debnath the fey master weaver, Zindi, the exemplar of practicality and carnal assurance are sometimes bizarre, often whimsical but always unforgettable.

In its form the book recalls Gunter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The style is multidimensional, ironic, a mixture of the bizarre and the ordinary. It abounds in stories, odd characters, frightful journeys, strange happenings. There is the conflict between reason and superstition, mind and feeling, criminality and the law, the collective and the individual.

Hanif Kureishi, author of the screenplay for *My Beautiful Laundrette*, admits that "Ghosh's writing is certainly more lively than a good deal of contemporary fiction in Britain. India seems full of stories of a kind that England, for instance, isn't. Perhaps there is now a sort of uniformity in British life that doesn't allow for the strangeness and sheer variety of the tales told about India and the Third World."

Kureishi adds that though Rushdie lives in Britain, one of his virtues "is his brilliant, creative thieving, his eclecticism. He has taken from India, from England, from both German and South American literature, using these influences to forge a new style, a unique voice. What he is able to do in a way that Amitav Ghosh cannot, is to unite the personal and the political.

Rushdie's characters, however, bizarre or idiosyncratic, always live in a real world of political pressures. We are able to see, in his work, the many complicated ways in which public politics determines private behaviour."

Writing in *The New York Times Book Review,* Anthony Burgess in rhapsodic about *The Circle of Reason.* He observes: "If much British fiction is effete and American fiction overcommercialised, Indian fiction, on the showing of Mr Rushdie and now Mr Ghosh, is alive. It has been alive for a long time, though not with sharp eyes and ears for the riches of post modernism. *The Circle of Reason* is not merely a highly contemporary construct: it looks ahead. Technically a lot of us can learn from Mr Ghosh. It is the intelligence, manifested in a brilliant handling of language, that most impresses us. Many western novels these days exhibit little more than the resources of a perverse sensorium. Here is a brain."

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki of Samurai descent. *An Artist of the Floating World,* like his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills,* is about the startling changes that befell Japan after the Second World War. The main protagonist, Masuji Ono, a famous painter now disgraced, reveres Japan's warrior past and is repelled by its present disintegration — "the floating world" of bars and geisha houses. Shortlisted for the 1986 Booker Prize, this is a fascinating story of a man and a nation crossing from one world into another.

Ishiguro admits that he was quite surprised to make it on to a recent list of "Best Young British Novelists" not least because he is Japanese. Kazuo was only five when his parents moved to England in 1960. Educated entirely in Britain, Ishiguro admits to being "stuck in the west." He is amused by the ease of his acceptance into the British literary establishment. Faber and Faber commissioned his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* which was taken up by Penguin, published in America and translated into ten foreign languages. His second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World,* has received favourable reviews, even from people he does not know.

Underlying both Ishiguro's books is a distinctively Japanese culture. It has to do with the feeling of loyalty which each individual has towards a superior. That relationship is the basic social unit in Japan. This is what holds Japan together. It is a system with many advantages. Part of the reason Japan can mobilise so rapidly industrially is its completely vertical structure. If a company decides to change its product, it can move like lightning. An idea will go straight down the line, because of this bond of patron to protege.

A Pale View of Hills has a supernatural dimension: is concerned with parental responsibility and a sense of lurking evil. Since the novel is set in Nagasaki, it was bound to be connected with atomic warfare. *An Artist of the Floating World* is about an old man overtaken by history, so that the things he was once proud of become things he is now ashamed of. He was doing something morally worthwhile in building a new Japan. After the war everyone tells him, "No, you weren't you were helping to create something that was evil." Ishiguro is "Interested in people who have a desire to distinguish themselves but find that they don't have it in them to be more than ordinary." He has no sympathy for the old Japan, "because what it produced was militarism and the Japanese version of fascism. After the war Japan gave up being militaristic and became industrial instead. But critical nonconformist thinking is still not encouraged. There remains the same kind of fierce loyalty, team spirit, an unquestioning attitude to authority."

The slow delicacy of Ishiguro's style has little in common with the Samurai tradition of writing typified by Yukio Mishima. Ishiguro sees himself as a product of a different Japanese tradition, more akin to western soap opera. He argues that it is a "profound, respectable genre, concerned with ordinary people. It has a pace which reflects the monotony and melancholy of every day life. You keep waiting for the story to begin, for something to happen. This is one reason why so few of the greatest Japanese writers are read in the west, and why Mishima is easier for the westerner to handle, because in his books there is action and drama."

The idea in Ishiguro's fiction is to study the main journey. He instinctively dislikes "plot" but concentrates instead on what lies below the surface. And who among us concerned with literature today will say that he is wrong?

Jehanara Wasi

The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry, Selected and translated by Mahmood Jamal, Penguin Books, 1986. 165 pages. £ 2.75.

Before the mid-nineteenth century, Urdu literature consisted almost entirely of poetry, the models coming from Persian. The bulk of Urdu poetry was made up of *ghazals* (love lyrics), narrative poems, panegyrics and quatrains. In the 1930s when the British Raj was at its height, Urdu poetry became a powerful vehicle for the expression of popular discontent. Mass politics emerged through the Indian freedom movement. Writers organised themselves in the Progressive Writers' Association, the most important literary body in India. Members of this radical organisation used their work to campaign for independence and equality. During this period of Indian history, Urdu became the main language of cultural resistance. From the optimism of the forties after the separation of Pakistan, Urdu poets traced the consequent disappointment of the fifties when the problems remained unsolved. Then came the scepticism of the sixties and the subsequent introversion that led to greater artistry.

Today Urdu poetry has emerged from the courts of kings and nawabs, the small literary circles and sprawling mansions, to document the prevailing moods of the subcontinent. The inspiration for the new poets such as Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ali Sardar Jafri no longer came from romantic love or ancient kings and queens. It came instead from the concrete possibilities opened for mankind by the Russian Revolution in 1917. The trauma of war, exploitation and the influence of Russian and French literature also played their part. A much-needed dynamism had at last been injected and a new era began, different in form and content.

The most significant and popularly acclaimed poet of modern Urdu literature, from his first impact in the 1930s and 1940s until his death in 1984, was Faiz Ahmad Faiz. His strength lay in the subtle blending of romance and idealism, simple diction and accessible images, and above all, in his desire to reach the masses and his concern for humanity. He hardly ever wrote free verse and maintained a certain rhythm and metre, often using the *ghazal* to convey a political message as no poet had done before him. In a poignant excerpt from *A Prison Nightfall*, Faiz says:

"Defiantly, a thought tells me

how sweet life is at this instant!
Those who brew the poison of cruelty
Will not win, tomorrow or today.
They can put out the lamps
where lovers meet;
they cannot blind the moon!"

In *encounters*, Faiz talks of death:

"And then,
without warning,
my waitings over, she is there to greet me:
my friend death
who is an enemy and a consoler,
death who is our murderer and our lover."

Ali Sardar Jafri's eminence as a poet lies both in his critical and theoretical writing and the way he brought revolutionary ideas and fervour into his work. Though his poems often lack Faiz's subtlety, he was responsible for reclaiming Urdu poetry and giving it a socialist aesthetic. A leading intellectual of the Left and a major figure in the Progressive Writers' Association, Jafri strikes a radical note in *Tears of Shame*:

"Where are the tears of shame
to wash the blood from our clothes
and the dirt of suspicion from our hearts?
Were they here, those tears,
our spirit would find strength.
This Man now caught in hate
and trapped in lust and greed,
Victim of his own politics,
this Man would dwell in love,
becoming god."

In a poem entitled *One Year*, Jafri asks,

"What is the meaning of imprisonment?
What is the significance of jails?
O year now asleep in time's graveyard,
on your shrivelled shadow
barking jaildogs weep.
I look at all this and I laugh."

Akhtar-ul-Iman, Faiz's contemporary, used a modernist, everyday style to address innovative topics such as *An Evening with a Black-and-White Feathered Bird*:

"Peace is like a fantasy for those
whose dreams are patched and torn;
they stitch one side and it tears on the other.
This world lives from moment to moment."

N.M. Rashed, whose free verse departed from tradition, was the first real modernist of Urdu literature. His contribution was to break down the very relationship between words that had typified earlier forms and to evolve and experiment with new forms and structures. In an excerpt from *The Dust Is Upon Us*, Rashed says:

"Today we hear
that senility and loneliness
arrive on dust and leave
the mark of night on day's shoes.
Dust has brought
limitless amazement;
it has stormed
the desolation of our hearts."

In the sixties Urdu poets

began to explore more personal areas of life. Their themes became more speculative and psychological. A new and welcome dimension was added. Another important development since the Second World War has been the emergence of women poets. Urdu poetry as a whole has been expanded and enriched by the subject matter and style of such poets as Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed. In *Truth*, Fahmida Riaz observes:

"Truth, pleasures, self-reliance
All toys of clay
Can break in a moment
Yet how beautiful is the world,
pure as Mary, bright as lies."

Kishwar Naheed's *I Am Not That Woman* is powerful and moving poem:

"I am not that woman
selling you socks and shoes!
Remember me, I am the one you hid
in your walls of stone, while you roamed
free as the breeze, not knowing
that my voice cannot be smothered by stones."

All these poets reflect the many-faceted life of twentieth century India. The translations attempt to convey the beauty and lyricism of the Urdu original. But perhaps what is most interesting and instructive is that poetry that began merely to please in a traditional way, adapted itself to revolutionary times and spoke with the voice not of kings but of the downtrodden, labourers and women.

Jehanara Wasi

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Theatre in Russia

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

The present history of the Russian Theatre can open with a Romain Rolland poser: "You wish to create a peoples' theatre? Begin with creating a people who are masters of their destiny." Later, he is said to have likened the post-Revolution Russia to this statement. Whatever the truth of this, the Russian theatre claims readily the love and homage of the people. According to the latest statistics, there are hundreds on hundreds of professional theatres with good artists and rich repertoires. Throughout the Soviet Union, there are theatres performing in 45 languages. There are also about 800 amateur groups.

While pre-revolutionary Russia had built up a grand tradition in theatre, evidently it was facing a crisis on the eve of this great upheaval. This is what Nemirovich-Danchenko, a co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre with Stanislavsky, writes of those times: "We had come to an impasse. Our theatre had lost its former verve and vitality and we were beginning to lose confidence not only in ourselves but in our art as well. We were less daring in our art and without daring there can be no true art." The revolution, however, brought an entirely new kind of audience to the theatre. Commenting on this, Stanislavsky has written: "The new audience turned out to be extremely appreciative. The people came not out of boredom but excitement and full of eagerness to see and hear something important, something they had never seen and heard before." The new theatre-goer was anything but a casual spectator. He came with bated breath, looking forward to something new. But of the numerous art forms that sprang up, as many were evanescent as those that enduring. A turbulence kept shaking everything up and helped to bring out the creative energy of many sincere and gifted artistes who enriched the Russian stage. Across

Indian Horizons Vol. XXXVI Nos. 3—4, 1987

it strode great giants like Stanislavsky who was amongst the earliest in the West to formulate a theory of acting, to evolve harmony in the ensemble, emphasise faith and conviction in the mental make-up of actors and to create depth and subtlety in the atmosphere. To them, the Revolution was not a matter of noise and violence, waving of flags and shouting of slogans. Stanislavsky wanted to capture and depict what he felt was the essence of this phenomenon, to speak frankly from the stage about the vital problems of contemporary life, untangle complexes and help sincere thinking, cast the characters true to life and convince the audience of the import of the play.

Vsevolod Meyerhold was another great creative reformer, seeking new ways, new methods, new forms of expression. Even to the classics he brought a fresh interpretation. He rose to great heights in his production and soon the world talked of "Meyerholdism". There arose still another star on the firmament, Evgeni Vaktangov, one of Stanislavsky's most talented pupils. He broke new ground with his outstanding production, "Princess Turandot", a scintillating fantasy in which the actors were given full freedom of improvisation.

The theatre became an active participant in the peoples' yearning for a new life with bigger dimensions to their orbit and functioning, as well as wider vistas to their vision.

Later, however, for a period continuing into World War II, the emotion developed into a kind of blind passion, which obscured the real man. Gorki had led the trail on labour themes for his dramas. But his approach and that of his followers and treatment were different. With them the intention had been to reveal the man, the human being, behind the factory uniform, show his talents, ambitions and social outlook. But now what was sought to be presented was not the man but his machine. What was revealed was not the play of his inner passions, but the minutest mechanical processes in which he was engaged, which made drama dull and futile. The emphasis now was on production with bigger targets, resulting in the relative shrinking of the man. Writers and producers rushed to building sites, big plants, vast complexes, becoming more preoccupied with technology than with human problems. With the result that the labour heroes of the bygone decades now became insipid automatons.

Thus a pseudo-art known as proletkult (Proletarian culture) came into vogue for a time, sponsored by a proletkult group which wanted to discard all the old classics, Russian and foreign alike. In reality it was not this proletkult that was wanted by the new audience. This turning point was aptly described by Stanislavsky when he said: "It is not good enough to represent the Revolution as a crowd marching with flags. It must be shown through the change in human psychology."

The Second World War served once again to broaden the concept of the theatre, for new plays were being staged wherever a site could be found: in dug-outs, in lorries, on warships, inside hospitals, etc. While bombers kept showering their deadly weapons, such performances at the forward areas are said to have totalled the staggering figure of 1,350,000, of which 5,00,000 were right on the battlefronts.

How the theatre lived through the War is a heroic epic in itself. While the battle raged on the outskirts of Moscow, and Leningrad was blockaded, the show went on. It is said that the muses of the theatre instilled courage in the people. Popular at many theatres was the play "Russian People" by Siminov, depicting the people's stamina and the boundless courage of the Russian encircled units. Several new plays of merit were written, some critical even of military commanders, like "Front" by Korneichuk. Not only were such plays performed, they were also published in papers with happy results. So deep was the concern of the Russian authorities to preserve the best in the theatre that they transported several of the theatres of far-off Siberia to shield them from bombs and assaults.

After the War, the new exaltation and self-confidence generated by the grim struggle for survival brought on a wave of upliftment, but most of it began once again to run into arid channels of negativity. For the plays now written began to highlight leadership and its importance, with a tendency to play down the rank and file, and the people whose sufferings and sacrifices had been of gigantic proportions, came to be cast into the shade. Powerful characters began to be replaced by tame ones, since conflict, whether individual or collective, was no more to be projected. Plays sounded pompous and hollow. A certain levelling in production style began to come about with the insistence on established form. Guidelines ruled as to what a character could or could not do. In short, "pleasing" plays depicting wishful thinking were put forward to take the place of stark reality, while misunderstandings were taken for dramatic conflicts. It was a kind of rigorous restricting of the public diet. Everything was patterned on what was supposed to be the Moscow Art Theatre style, which seems a terrible irony, because the one thing that Stanislavsky did not aim at was uniformity. His entire effort was to encourage a creative effort from every artiste, he himself being a restless searching innovator who hated working to a ready-made recipe. In fact several of his pupils had founded each his own school and theatre. These negative tendencies were probably the outgrowth of the personality cult that held sway for a period. The tide however turned and a new and brighter era set in for the Russian stage, to which the young as well as the veterans started contributing richly.

The last few years have seen the rise of several new theatre groups and personalities. But the spirit of adventure is not confined only to the new. It has captivated the minds of the old too.

To me, visiting Russia after a period of ten years, it was quite a stirring experience to see the vast and deep changes in the theatre world. In my previous visit I had no doubt been delighted with what I saw, but rather depressed at the lack of variety, the absence of real experimentation. This time I saw horizon upon horizon opening up new vistas, gripping and fascinating. The old touch of uniformity had been disturbed, if not wholly brushed away. The fear of daring new strokes across the dramatic firmament, painting vivid personalities and poignant situations, had melted under the warm touch of a fresh creative urge. The struggle has been fruitful and has brought with it a whiff of rejuvenation and an endless diversity, the very essence of life. Some of my recent impressions I propose to share here with theatre-lovers in this country.

Moscow presented well over 250 plays a week, each of them different, and around 5000 spectators are said to see them daily, which is a sizeable figure. Some of these theatres, like the Bolshoi and the Maly, date back to the 18th century, while a few are barely a couple of years old. They cover an immense range of diversity. Each theatre has its own history, its romantic origin and often a creditable struggle to maintain its distinctive character. Each may be taken as having a flavour of its own.

Some of the larger theatres — the Bolshoi, Maly and Gorki— have each a subsidiary theatre, featuring normally the same actors. But the plays selected have to be such as can be simply produced. These theatres are located mostly off the city haunts to offer especially the residents of outlying districts an opportunity to see and enjoy new and good plays.

Let us begin a round of some of the theatres by a visit to the Moscow Art Theatre founded by Stanislavsky along with Danchenko, which is now named after Maxim Gorki. This theatre marked a radical break with the then established order of the stage run by the rigid bureaucracy-bound administration of the Imperial

Theatre. Stanislavsky, then an amateur actor and producer, and Nemirovich-Danchenko, a play-wright, critic, producer and teacher, together planned the new Moscow Art Theatre whose objective was to portray the people and provide them with aesthetic pleasure. They set out to do away with the old manner of theatricality and affected over-acting. "There are no small parts, only small actors" was their slogan. An eminent Russian theatre artiste gave them another slogan : "Take your models from life and nature".

The opening of the new Moscow Art Theatre in 1898 with a Tolstoy tragedy was a great historic event. Moscow was seeing for the first time a finely chiselled show, laid out with love and labour. It showed a remarkably penetrating interpretation of a page out of Russian history, and a profound presentation of the various characters. Some of the costumes from that play are in fact preserved in the Theatre Museum in Moscow. The Moscow Art Theatre we know of today with its distinctive style came later. The spirit of that movement was expressed by Chekhov, when he wrote : "In life people do not continuously commit suicide and make love, but eat, drink, flirt and talk nonsense. This must be shown on the stage. We must make a play where people come, go, eat, talk about the weather and play whist... let everything in the play be as complex and as simple as in life."

When the Art Theatre took its new name after Gorki, it is said that the company did not find it so easy to switch over from the subtle and sensitive to the grim sturdy world of Gorki and his first play, staged in 1905, "The Petty Bourgeois" failed to ignite the revolutionary spirit. What followed was indeed drama. The theatre became a cockpit of battle, and mounted gendarmes patrolled the streets round about on the night of every premiere of Gorki's and instead of ushers, police in uniform checked the tickets. In fact Stanislavsky once said that one felt this was not a first night but rather the opening of a pitched battle. In 1905, on the eve of the Revolution, when Gorki's "Children of the Sun" was being staged, an attack by a monarchist crowd was expected on the theatre. The fourth act of this play depicts a riot scene and when the curtain went up, the audience took it to be the actual expected attack and the agitated spectators could be quieted only after a terrific effort.

The play I witnessed was, "The 6th of July". It was indicated in the programme that the author, Michail Shatrov, considered this an experimental production, that it was unusual in form and content, representing a special genre, based on documented material.

The action takes place in Moscow, historically on July 6, 1918, when the V All Russian Congress of the Soviets was being held. The country is not completely free of World War I. The general line proposed by the Bolsheviks is to take advantage of the Brest-Litovsk treaty offered by the Germans and put an end to the bigger war. The Left wing of the Party however, in high excitement, wishes to continue the war with Germany and indulges in provocative acts, such as murdering the German Ambassador even as he is negotiating the termination of hostilities. But the Left wing move is not supported by the Party Congress, which is made to realise by leaders like Lenin that this is doomed to failure.

The whole production was laid out on a revolving stage, with each scene permanently fixed for the entire drama. The play opened with a crowd moving about in a tense atmosphere, waiting for the Party Congress to open. The stage moved and an auditorium came into view with a long table and the Party members sitting at it, engaged in heated argument, with a rostrum at the side from which the leaders addressed the Congress. Next, one saw some important personages captured by the rebels; the action then moved on to the annexe which had been made the Headquarters of the Left rebels. Then came Lenin's office, where he was holding crucial discussions over the telephone and in person. The last scene to come into view was the German Embassy (the only scene not permanently fixed), where the Ambassador is shot by the Left faction.

In the centre of the backdrop was a big-sized clock brightly illuminated to show the passage of time. When time moved fast, with rapid action, the hands of the clock kept spinning and flashing with answering flashes from the moving floor where lights had been fixed.

There was the flicker of a Japanese touch when the whole auditorium was made part of the stage. When, during the Party Congress, the Left-wing leader began to rail against leaders like Lenin, a figure in military uniform was suddenly spotlighted on the topmost gallery, whence he went on rasping replies to the rebel leader. As the rebel reached a crescendo all the doors of the auditorium were flung open and armed guards became visible with the spotlight on them. The entire assembly was now surrounded by armed men, who took over the critical situation. The presentation, no less than the settings, was unorthodox, very imaginative and bold in expression.

A factor of considerable significance was seeing Lenin on the stage played by Boris Smirnov. It is considered one of his most striking artistic achievements. One recognises the character easily, not so much by the physical likeness to Lenin but by some subtle sense of his presence and by the mischievous, shrewd glint in the eye. He is shown as full of buoyant vigour, a penetrating, probing air when he is gripped by an idea, and a readiness to laugh amidst the gloom of adversity. That's how Smirnov portrays this Russian leader. The overall impression one gets is that the actor wants to convey the delight Lenin takes in the shaping of the Revolution.

The first actor to have portrayed Lenin was Gribov. As a matter of fact there is a recorded rehearsal of the scene where he plays Lenin. Nemirovich-Danchenko advised the actor that every phrase he uttered should flash like lightning, in fact there should be lightning in the eyes and the voice. "Fiery thinker is what makes the leader," he concluded.

The Moscow Pushkin Theatre is said to specialise in the heroic in drama. The play that I saw here was based on Book II of the well-known novel "Virgin Soil Upturned" by M. Sholokhov. It was an all-star performance, for everyone involved in it had won distinction in his own field. The writer was a recipient of the Lenin Prize; the chief stage director was the well-known Boris Ravenakhikh: People's Artist of Russia, Laureate and State Prize Winner; the decor was by E.K. Kovalenko, Merited Artist; the music composer, B.A. Morrousov, Laureate of the State. Among leading players may be mentioned Shopkina, Chikov and Vikland.

The drama was laid in a village during the early days of the Bolshevik Revolution, where the kulaks were powerful and struggled hard to maintain their hold. The revolutionary drive had therefore to come from the urban side. Here we have a complex situation, with revolutionary workers from urban areas trying to operate revolutionary programmes in the farms and overcome the resistance of the kulaks opposed to the formation of the collectives, resulting in violence, shooting and death. It is interspersed by moving interludes caused by human relationships and emotional entanglements between men and women, the struggle of loyalties between the Bolshevik cause and family calls. The entire play has a single setting: rolling fields, at one end of which is a small house with its interior open to full view of the audience.

Though the play was complicated, the settings were severely simple. It was a powerful play. Nevertheless the mood, the approach to problems as well as the emphasis obviously belonged to a different age and one which in the present context would lay itself open to a more critical appraisal. These doubts of mine were confirmed very soon when I was discussing the Russian drama old and new with a noted stage artiste. He was emphasising the need for complete sincerity in drama and cited this very play as one in the doubtful category.

The Vakhtangov Theatre is named after one of Stanislavsky's eminent pupils, Yevgeny Vakhtangov. He was a humanist like Tolstoy and tried to stress the validity of man's spiritual life as imbibed from his master, but with tools which he forged for himself in the way of strikingly eloquent theatrical forms which were termed "theatricism". He wrote: "To triumph, the artist needs Antaeus's earth — the people, they are his earth."

The Vakhtangov Theatre blossomed out of Vakhtangov's studio, which provided the nucleus for this well-known and interesting theatre of moscow. It created strikingly eloquent froms which were needed as vehicles to express the essence of man's inner or spiritual life. Modernity, Theatricism and Simplicity were their motto. This theatre, which has won the Order of the Red Banner was the first to portray the Revolution by putting the people on the stage and presenting an impersonation for the first time of Lenin, by the famous actor Boris Shchuk in Pogodin's play, "Man with a Gun", in 1937.

Later, Sergei Markushev portrayed Lenin in Dmitry Zorin's "Eternal Source", produced by Boris Babochkin, which I had occasion to see on an earlier visit to Moscow. The play depicted Lenin in the villages, caught up in the storm raging between the old and the new forces. He had to devise practical means to resolve harrowing everyday problems. The presentation was novel, though the settings were conventional, and the overriding philosophy was simple and modern. It was a strange experience for me to watch Sergei Markushev act the role of Lenin. Here was no attempt to give a photographic likeness of the leader, no imitation of Lenin's gestures. Rather the aim was to stamp the play with the power of his teachings, his pragmatic approach and the tactics he employed.

This time the play I saw in the Vakhtangov Theatre was "Cinderella", the old, old fairytale adapted in a new version for adults. It was written by E. Shvartz and directed by the famous Ruben Simonov, People's Artist of the U.S.S.R. Ruben Simonov, who heads this theatre, is a producer with a wide imagination. The theatre has, like the Moscow Art Theatre, its own theatrical training school, named after Shehukin, the "Father of the Russian Theatre". The story though based on the original Cinderella, has some interesting variations. The king, the father of the prince, has a definite role in this version. He seems as charmed by Cinderella as the prince. In fact he takes obvious delight in his son linking up with the girl. He is also actively interested in the chase to find the true owner of the glass slipper.

A lot of local colour is lent to the play by the side interludes and the endless gossip which the king and his henchmen indulge in. Thus, even though it is a fairytale it becomes an intimate drama taking place in one's own community and the characters are from the neighbourhood. For instance every time the king is confronted with a difficult situation, he promptly threatens to abdicate, renounce the world and enter a monastery. This also lends a political veneer to the tale. Most of Cinderella's family background is provided through local gossip in which her father also joins. So one learns through it of the shrewish stepmother and of the unkind sisters creating misery for her.

The talk also throws some light on the social life of the families around. The impending ball at the palace is discussed by the guards who predict a romance and some extraordinary incidents. Thus the story instead of being other-worldly and far removed becomes earthly and related to the audience. It gains an intimacy and humanness introducing some novel elements. The settings are simple and more suggestive than realistic. Even the palace scene does not sparkle nor does the ballroom glitter, and this allows the actors to stand out more vividly instead of being shrouded in glamour. While part of the action takes place on the front of the stage, part of it and an important scene is shown in a palace corridor on the other side of the wall of the main room and the action is watched by the audience through the row of windows. This creates rather an intriguing atmosphere. It also permits simultaneous action.

The Lenin Komsomol Theatre, as the name indicates, is the theatre of the youth of the country, conducted by the Young Communist League. It took shape many years ago. The first group consisted of young gifted actors drawn from factory workers. It is said that it went through rather a negative period when it tried to make a cult of the "Proletariat Culture", scornfully turning its back on other cultural trends and particularly foreign theatrical influences. This rigidity was luckily broken by the emergence of the New Moscow Art Theatre.

An eminent actor of the time, Bresenev, came to head this company, bringing with him a team of gifted artistes. While the factory workers threw up mature actors and producers as time went on, other new talent was also recruited and many actors of this theatre made their name in the drama world. Anatoly Efros, the present director, is acknowledged as an artiste of considerable individuality whose motto is "verisimilitude", which is a documentary technique combined with imagainative theatrical force. The stage for him is the instrument through which to talk frankly to the youth on many questions. Its aims as now stated are: to feature the story of modern youth; to present the best works of foreign dramaturgy; and, above all, to depict the life of the youth of the world and to define the ideals it wishes to realise.

Here I saw Chekhov's "The Seagull". I realised how when Chekhov emerged with his plays they called for entirely new types of production and acting. He depicted the intellectuals of the 19th century as crippled by the banality and vulgarity of the life of those days. It was however his faith in the future, in the generations to come that made his writings meaningful. The producer had to grasp this essence, the inner core of Chekhov's various facets, and give it theatrical form as well as permeate it with the poetry of everyday life. Even the landscape had a part to play. In fact it is said that the real birth of the Moscow Art Theatre came with its first presentation of "The Seagull". That is how it became the Theatre's emblem, to remain for all time on its curtain, its programmes, its bills and membership badges.

"The Seagull" is a poetic drama and has been considered the first distinctively Chekhov play which heralded the birth of a new era for the stage. Henceforth spectacles and melodrama were ruled out. Chekhov defined his purpose as making the new theatre refined and poetic. That is how every character of Chekhov's, to quote Nemirovich-Danchenko, "holds something untold, a hidden drama, a secret dream, an inner anguish, an entire untold hidden life. Somewhere, suddenly, in a phrase or scene, it comes to the surface, causing that truly artistic sense of satisfaction which makes up the theatre..."

This production of "The Seagull" was much simpler than an earlier one I had seen on a previous visit. This was a definite departure from the old and conventional. There were only two main settings. The play opened with a scene of the countryside where the drama takes place. The other scenes were placed inside the house, mostly around the dining table. One cannot but recall here Chekhov's observation: "People dine and while they eat their fortunes are made and their lives broken."

The Maly Theatre was established in 1824. At its entrance sits Alexander Ostrovsky in bronze, affectionately referred to as "the

Landlord". The theatre is also known as Ostrovsky House. A prolific writer, Ostrovsky offered fifty comedies covering many aspects of Russian life with masterly mirth. But we have to go further back to trace the evolution of the Maly Theatre as a national factor in the revolutionary life of the country. A year after its birth, in December 1825, an abortive political uprising spread terror and depression over the country. "The ringing, expansive songs of Pushkin alone resounded in the valley of the suffering," wrote a historian of the times. Then out of this gloom came the voice of the Maly Theatre.

Away from imperial St. Petersburg, the Maly Theatre seemed to have started a new epoch. Those seeking to breathe the air of freedom found it here. Mikhail Schepkin, an ex-serf, was its leading actor. He tried to prove that the artistic force of an actor is determined above all by the dynamics of ideas, by his simplicity and truth, above all by his love for human beings. He plucked ideas from the living book of life and built up a great tradition for posterity.

"Spiritually, the Maly Theatre exerted a greater influence on me than the gymnasium. It taught me to see and understand all that is beautiful", wrote Stanislavsky of it in his *My Life in Art*. What makes it exciting is that it does not tie itself up with one rigid tradition, but welcomes new trends and experiments and lets the fresh breath of contemporary life blow through its stage wings. A touch of modernity is evident even in its classical productions. It not only draws on the Shehepkin Theatrical School, where classes are conducted by actors of the company, but takes on any producer with a new touch and a flair for originality, who is free to contribute to the building up of the formidable standard the Maly is known for.

One such master artiste is Boris Rovenskikh who produced Tolstoy's "Power of Darkness", which led to heated debates. The play is based on a real incident. A villager kills a child begotten by his stepdaughter and later confesses the crime at her wedding. Tolstoy's genius converted this criminal case into a profound social tragedy, depicting the life in a degraded community, ruled by ignorance and devoid of spiritual fibre. It was explained to me that the producer and the artistes chose to convert darkness into light, by trying to show up the latent talents, normally suppressed in these people by harsh factors, as well as the innate kindliness still lurking in them, softening the guilt of crime with human pathos. As one watches the drama, one is convinced there is something worthwhile in each character.

Rovenskikh makes generous use of symphonic and folk music in this production. A touch of the old classics is lent to the tragedy by the use of the chorus to accompany the action on the stage. Music offered relief from the otherwise depressing succession of gloomy events, and drama is after all the synthesis of all the arts. A really starting innovation was the sudden extinguishing of the sun in the stage sky and the substitution for it of a moon to provide the appropriate atmosphere for the hero and his girl.

The Yermolovo Theatre merits attention, even though it has not the same romantic history as some others. The Yermolovo Theatre is in a way the expression of the stage personality of Nikolai Khmelyov, who lent it the creative originality and poetic imaginativeness so characteristic of his dramatic talent. His personality was imbued with high intellectual qualities, profound philosophical thought and depth of emotion. He seems to have left an imprint of these qualities on the group performing here.

A unique fact about this theatre is that it seems to have been reared on the plays of certain authors. Gorki's philosophical plays, Shakespeare's poetic dramas and Ostrovsky's comedies. Khmelyov's emphasis was on expressive theatre forms. He taught the young artistes to regard all artistic phenomena with discrimination as behoves those who dedicate themselves to the cause of the dramatic muse.

I understand that at one time this theatre was known as the "Laboratory of Modern Plays". In the course of experiments and enquiries it discovered new talent to add new names to the glory of the Soviet theatre.

It seemed the natural thing to see a Gorki play at the Yermolovo — Summer Vacationists. The drama is meant to depict the Russian bourgeoisie of the pre-Revolution days, gathered in their country homes for the summer. The point sought to be brought out is that these folks do not belong to the countryside, and do not become part of the landscape or environment. The local peasants look on them as migratory birds. In some of them, however, there is a growing emptiness which makes them restless, dissatisfied, and they do not know what it is they want. Almost unconsciously they are looking for something. There is a sense of unreality about them, like specks moving in a glass bowl, with little or no purpose to anchor them.

The production was in the realistic style and the settings kept changing with the different scenes. This style seemed to achieve popularity with a certain section of the audience. For when the curtain rose on a pretty country cottage with flowers in bloom, the scene was greeted with applause.

Vivian Leonid Sergeevich is the art director of the Pushkin Drama Academic Theatre, Leningrad, the oldest State Theatre, founded in 1758 by the Empress Elizabeth.

Vivian Sergeevich pointed out to me that a unique feature of this theatre was that it carried five generations of artistes working in it at the same time. "It is at times quite a tantalising problem even though they all follow the same method and style," he remarked. He admitted that he himself belonged to the second generation. The first had practically faded out. He confessed that he and his kind did not believe in just clinging to the old and preserving it. "Theatre is not a museum for antiques," he remarked. "Theatre has to develop methods to keep abreast of the times. Playwrights and theatre artistes together are all the time seeking suitable forms to manifest current problems." They did not always find the ideal drama, he explained, and so they sought to dramatise literary works of merit. They also drew on foreign classics as well as contemporary drama from abroad. They were currently running "To Each His Own" by Ahoshin and "Death of a Salesman" by Arthur Miller.

He described the bases of his method as Laconism and Expressiveness. Laconism he defined as expression of emotions through few means and forms. And, in his opinion, emotions had to be restrained and when they had to be expressed the vehicle for that should be very selective and should reflect the essence of the character, with the least demonstrativeness. Therefore these manifestations had to be few and very exact. Mr Sergeevich then proceeded to explain the word "expressiveness". He said it could be best defined as contrasted with descriptiveness. In this sense, every movement and gesture, even the stage property, must convey an idea, succinctly and neatly, without elaboration and decoration. This meant that each must be so charged and pregnant with valid substance as to convey the richness of its content without embellishment.

I asked him for a concrete example from one of his productions. He narrated the story of a play built around the last days of a professor, doomed to die very soon of an incurable disease. He decides to devote his last days to his scientific work, instead of to himself. Here the stage becomes an inclined floor. There are no doors or windows, only shelves lined with books. The man is depicted as withdrawn into a single purpose, showing only the things important to him, to emphasise his character. He said he used light effects very subtly and music to stress the main moods.

His whole objective in the production of a play was to stimulate and bring to awareness the best a human being possessed. That was why the method of production was so very important. He stressed once again his firm belief that simplicity of expression was necessary to make people understand the main purpose behind a play, as contrasted with getting involved in insignificant side action. Once again I asked for an illustration and he readily offered one: A woman in grief, in a conventional presentation, would make a great show of her distress, might go into hysterics. While his depicting of great sorrow would be one of restraint, may be tears glistening in the eyes or one drop rolling down the cheek, the whole atmosphere would be surcharged with the heavy weight of grief instead of being broken by loud crying and wailing.

Vivian Sergeevich is known as the initiator of this technique—simplicity and restraint. I witnessed this technique in a play done by the students of the third-year faculty of producers of the State Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography. The play was "Of Mice And Men" by John Steinbeck and was directed by Professor Tovstonogov, Laureate of Lenin and People's Artist of the Russian Federation of Republics. The production though in the new mode was not abstract. Each scene had some symbolic props to give meaning to it. The setting was in the style of the arena theatre. But, as the auditorium already had a proscenium, this had to be shut off by a backdrop and the play itself was performed on a platform erected in front. The few props needed were brought on to the platform, as and when required by the actors themselves, in a completely informal manner and were later removed when no longer needed. The sets were severely simple, rough-hewn from wood.

The play opened by a riverside, but the only object visible was a tree-trunk lying on the ground to form the central object around which the first and the last scenes were enacted.

The other scene was a ranch. In the background were two sets of very rough wooden shelves stuck back into the stage with the backdrop raised to the height of the shelves. Inside the room was a two-tier wooden bed, a table, a bench, all old and battered. An air of remoteness was created to give the feeling that we were very far from normal human haunts, an element vital to the core of the play; for the mentally abnormal young man in the play has to be put to work in a quiet nook far from the turbulent crowd. Very meaningful was a big window through which the action was viewed. This gave a bigger dimension to an otherwise very small setting. The play opened with a song sung by all the actors. This chorus style of singing kept running throughout the play, off and on. There was of course the usual background music for accent and atmosphere. The play is too well known to need fresh narration. It moved swiftly, creating a kind of awe. But it was pleasantly free from the oppressive tensions afflicting many modern productions which almost choke one with breathlessness, even though it was very tense and seemed to keep climbing from a high key to one higher. Even the last scene, wherein the brothers shoot each other, was not seized or rocked by the usual agonising emotional bangs that are so much the feature of modern plays. One realised Vivian Sergeevich's philosophy that restraint of emotions and the use of the least demonstration best expresses the essence of a character and the purpose behind the play.

One not only saw but felt strongly within oneself the masterly hand of the Director, Prof Tovstonogov, working out this unique presentation of a strange and uncanny play in a natural, superb fashion, until it became a convincing and therefore a pathetic and heart-rending tale. How true it is that in the teaching of dramatics the aim should be to bring to awareness the best that is within the artistes. Here we saw it in each member of the group. The talent seemed even and therefore smooth, with no trace of ruggedness.

Mr Akinov is the director of the Theatre of Comedy, Leningrad. Akinov started out as a theatre painter. His room carries a fair number of his paintings. An aspect of theatre work in Russia is that quite a few of the theatre personnel make their names as painters, apart from cultivating the dramatic talents they possess. And, leaving aside stage decor, they also put on canvas the scenes as presented in certain plays, so that they remain as a permanent pictorial record of the passing facets of the Russian theatre.

Akinov struck me as quite a powerful personality and very self-possessed. He talked of his work with great confidence. Knowing something of his theatre background, how hard he had to battle for his convictions, how courageously he had carried on, I had eagerly looked forward to meeting him.

Akinov proudly called himself a follower of Meyerhold. He said he was also an admirer of Vakhtangov who according to him, combined the Stanislavsky and Meyerhold styles. Meyerhold's method, he explained, had come under a cloud and it was only after the political and social changes of 1956, that the Meyerhold style had once more come into its own, and it had become possible for him to develop his mode freely. I asked why Meyerhold had gone into oblivion for a time, since I had already understood that his own identification with that style and the new innovations he had tried to introduce on this pattern had cost him dearly. Akinov explained very carefully the immense services rendered by Vsevolod Meyerhold as also by Yevgeny Vakhtangov, searching conscientiously for new dramatic modes as against the diehard traditions of the old academic theatre.

Akinov talked a great deal about Meyerhold, how he had traversed a knotty and controversial path, giving rise to conflicting reactions, how he had replaced the old magnificence and ornamentation with a kind of ascetic simplicity, how he had lent caustic touches to some of his shows, to highlight the banality of certain classes of people.

According to Akinov, Meyerhold was more symbolic, though not quite in the Chinese or Japanese manner, but as contrasted with Stanislavsky's which was commonly accepted as realistic. He personally did not like the word naturalism, which meant something quite different.

I asked Akinov whether he considered himself the innovator of a new style. He promptly said, "No. I consider myself only one who has brought back to life the Meyerhold style, first in decor, then in production. This has come back afresh, so in that way I may indirectly be responsible for a new method."

The play I witnessed in the Theatre of Comedy directed by N.P. Akinov was a light comedy, "Wedding Party For All Europe", obviously designed as a satire on television. It was written by two young writers, Gorin and Arkanov, who are known to write candidly and fearlessly, especially for the younger generation in the magzine, *Youth*.

The story is as follows : A television station decides to televise a real wedding due to take place in the city, for a European hookup. All the action takes place in the bride's house, except for that in the TV studio. The opening scene shows the relatives from country parts arriving for the wedding in their rustic clothes. The TV party arrives and is churlish, for it does not like either the house or the people assembled and wants everything to be changed. So a heavy hand begins to move everything about, breaks down a side wall, incidentally exposing the toilet to public view, later to be covered by a curtain. The rest of the house is rearranged, creating great confusion. The country folk are put into city clothes, causing them discomfort. But the TV people are not satisfied. They feel the rural people do not lend themselves to TV appearance. So they are gradually replaced one by one. This infuriates the bridegroom so much that he decides to quit, but fails to carry the bride with him, so greatly is her vanity tickled by the thought of her appearance on TV. The bridegroom, therefore, has to be replaced by a professional TV man. But as the TV camera begins shooting the wedding scene, the TV bridegroom attempts to snatch the customary kiss from the bride, which enrages her into tearing the bridal veil and bolting away. So a studio girl has to be substituted, and now the wedding is reduced to a make-believe studio event instead of a real one. This, however, is not the end. As the shooting restarts, a technician runs in to announce that the whole programme is off because of some technical defect which has developed in the inter-continental circuit.

Actually, there is nothing distinctive either in the play or the production to stamp it as the handiwork of so distinguished a producer as Akinov, a man of great courage and firm convictions. For this purpose he had established the New Theatre, where some original and distinctive work was accomplished. Later however he left this to join the Theatre of Comedy, which according to considered opinion, does not seem to have the character or flavour to do justice to a personality of Akinov's stature.

Yuri Lubimov is the Director of the Moscow Theatre of Drama and Comedy, known also as the Tanganka Theatre because of its location in the street of that name. This is the youngest of the Moscow theatres. Lubimov has already distinguished himself and won recognition as a Merited Artist of the USSR. He graduated from the Vaktangov Theatre School and for a time taught there. He was eager to try out new experiments and began this work in a studio in the school itself with the assistance of the final-year students. When they passed out they formed themselves into a group. They began to work quietly and in obscurity until they were ready to come before the public, confident they had something worthwhile to offer. Their aim was a synthesis of the theatre arts, fusing the traditional from Stanislavsky and Meyerhold with Brecht's concepts of drama and its aesthetics.

Lubimov confessed his faith in the dramaturgy of Brecht, which the latter defined as the People's Theatre. "My own concept of the real theatre is the People's Theatre. Brecht's aim in dramaturgy was to reveal candidly and precisely present-day problems in all their complexity through a synthesis of rhythm, plasticity, music, singing." In describing some of the peculiar elements of Brecht's style, he said: "Brecht's ingenuity lay in using very ordinary things to achieve certain effects. For instance in the play "The Kind Man from Sezuwan", a young woman appears disguised as a young man by donning a boy's cap and putting on a pair of dark glasses. Though this may seem superficial, the little trick achieved its purpose." In Lubimov's appraisal, Brecht used quite conventional symbols to represent even complex elements in our present-day life and made use of time and space to gain certain effects. Brecht's stories, he explained, were parables and therefore had the power to make a strong impact. We then talked about naturalism and realism. Lubimov proved rather sensitive on this. "I hate naturalism," he asserted with some heat. "It is a photographic depiction of life. Goethe put it with a caustic vividness when he remarked: 'If a painter were to copy a dog on the canvas, it would only mean adding one more animal, but no art'." "When I asked what, according to him, was Realism, he replied smilingly that the book "Realism Without Horizon" by Gorodi gave expression to his credo. "I believe in diversity of styles and in my opinion each theatre should have its own special style and build up an individuality."

In further elaborating the Brecht style, Lubimov explained that the Brecht element was essentially political, for his concept of the theatre was political. But at the same time he insisted on a precision and straightforwardness that come only out of deep sincerity and honesty.

The play I witnessed at the Moscow Theatre of Drama and Comedy was a translation from the German of Brecht's "The Good Person of Szechwan", presented as a parable in three acts, under Lubimov's direction.

It was what might be called an avant-garde performance, in its settings, acting and total composition. The play opened with all the actors lined up, two of them holding musical instruments, an accordion and a guitar and all of them ringing in chorus. This was supposed to give the keynote to the theatre as the People's Theatre, which aims at representing them — the people. This is the emphasis Brecht put on his dramas. On the right side of the stage hung a big picture of Brecht, lit up from time to time to emphasise certain points or aspects of the play.

The story is about a young woman who earned her living by taking in men guests. She is handsomely rewarded by three, who come to the city on a mission and are given shelter by her. With this money she tries to set up a tobacco shop, but soon finds herself overwhelmed by a host of poor and destitute people, some of whom had scorned her when she was in less affluent circumstances. Having always been soft and generous-hearted, she is unable to say no to anyone. The landlady of the shop demands a large amount as advance rent. All in all she finds herself in a very difficult situation.

To save herself from these pressures, she slips away and returns disguised as a young man. The disguise is very thin; a boy's cap on the head and a pair of dark glasses are all that is used for the transformation. It is what is called a "conventional" disguise, for it is accepted as such even though it is only make-believe. The young man is firm, pragmatic and business-like. He poses as her cousin who has come to put her affairs in order. He clears the place of the hangers-on and gets the concern going. The girl is back again but is soon lured by a penniless man who cares not for her but only for her money. To save herself from falling into his toils she disappears and the young man (her cousin) arrives instead.

Once again he tries to get things into shape with his firmness. But the intended bridegroom, as also the others who could live off her, demands that he produce his cousin. When he cannot, he is arrested on suspicion of doing away with her. During the trial, in desperation the girl reveals herself, throwing off her disguise. She asserts that because they live in a poverty-stricken society of exploitation, these unhappy conditions prevail and she regrets having had to take recourse to unkind methods. What she enunciates is Brecht's credo, that poverty prevails because of exploitation and is, therefore, the cause of misery in this world.

All the action takes place against a single background and setting. First there is a road, with the suggestion of a house at one side. Later the front part of the road becomes converted into the tobacco shop where the entire drama goes on. In the last scene, the same setting becomes a court scene by the introduction of three judges who use the shop-counter as a table. Every character is distinctive, though inclined at times to be rather overdrawn.

The intention here seemed to be to emphasise each human being as a separate entity, to prove that people are not just an unformed nebulous mass. All were presented in the poorest and most destitute condition, in very shabby clothes, looking utterly down and out. Everyone looked very tense, physically and emotionally, at every turn charged and ready to explode. Each character signified something and none was unimportant.

The story itself was like a thin thread running through a vortex. It was quite hard to keep up with the speed and the ceaseless movement of the characters. It was in fact like watching a kite in a hurricane. Musical notes were struck from time to time to lend significance to certain moments. Two instrumentalists also kept appearing, especially at the opening of each act, and playing the same tune. The stress always seemed to be on the conviction that poverty is the result of exploitation and is at the root of all human misery.

This theatre is one of the most popular and it is very difficult to get tickets for the shows. The gushing enthusiasm was evident when, at the end of the play, the applause would not stop and the artistes were called back repeatedly, as though the audience simply did not wish to let them go.

A new programme now part of this theatre's repertory, drawing crowds, is an adaptation of Andrei Voznesensky's book of poems, "Antiworlds". It also has an evening of a "Poetorio" in which Voznesensky has teamed up with modernist composer Rodion Schedrin to recite to the accompaniment of a choir and orchestra. There is also a full-fledged musical base on Voznesensky's poetry, with libretto by the young novelist Vassily Aksenov.

Theatre Sovremennik: sovremennik literally means contemporary. It was started in 1956 by a group of enterprising young players from various Moscow theatres, and headed by Olag Efremov. It was considered one of the forward-looking theatres. It aspired to clear away what were felt to be the cobwebs which made the current atmosphere murky, and to analyse vital issues particularly those facing youth. Original skills and techniques were freely exploited for effective stage presentation. The unfolding of the themes bristled with controversies and resultant excitement. Already more youthful figures are overtaking the pioneer group with their fresh experiments.

Efremov started by carefully explaining that his theatre was not really modern, that is avant-garde, since it observed the Stanislavsky principles. "We are his followers," he asserted as though to remove any lurking doubts. "But Stanislavsky was not dogmatic, with a set system," I interposed. He explained that by Stanislavsky's principles he meant being in conformity with current times, not removed from them. Efremov then proceeded to deny that he used any novel methods. "My philosophical concept of the theatre is a medium that reflects life, present-day life", he asserted. His main emphasis however was in his belief that the actor was the principal figure in the theatre, through whose skill the play had to be conveyed. He was unhappy that in recent years the domination of the producer had been growing often at the cost of the actor. Where the egoism of the producer asserted itself, the actor suffered in status and became dwarfed in importance. In such instances the actor became a mere puppet in the director's hands.

He acknowledged however the importance of the director. But he was for striking a balance between the two. "I believe in giving the actor full liberty of acting, but I am well aware of the danger of its being misused. Equally, if directors also take full liberty there is the converse danger of the actor's personality being diminished," he eleborated. "Until recently plays were known by the actors, now they are known more by their directors. One sees a distinct shift in the focus." According to him, it is the actors who make the theatre. Stanislavsky too in the early days laid great stress on the director. But later he emphasised the need for the build-up of the actor. He championed the need for liberty for them also.

To him the main task before the theatre builders was to balance the two factors. "In my opinion this is possible by an understanding of the roles of the two," he avowed. He defined the task of the producer as one of stressing the idea behind the play and maintaining the structure. In this connection he referred to the play "The Elder Sister" (which I shall presently describe), directed by L. Anokhin. He felt it was a case in which the very notion of the play was wrongly conceived. The acting was good but it could not counter the faulty interpretation. We swung back again to the role of the actor. I questioned him on the two theories on acting ; the one that believes in practising before the mirror and settling down to certain set gestures and movements, and the other leaving it to the actor's inspiration of the moment. He gave no direct answer, but elaborated on the theme of the actor, quoting the famous Danchenko, "The actor is the essence of the theatre. The actor must all the time be aware of his role in the theatre and raise his intellectual level so as to bring home to the audience the actor's importance. But the main thing is honesty and sincerity."

We then talked of plays. He said a play which otherwise would have been great could lose its grandeur if the writer did not really seem to believe in what he wrote and the ideas he expressed in private life were at variance with his public expressions. Thus the significance of the point behind the theme was weakened. I was surprised to hear him say he was interested in Vedic philosophy, its optimism and dialectics. He was strongly for idealism in literature, in every type of writing. He wanted more writers like Dostosvsky and Tolstoy who had these elements.

In conclusion, he briefly talked of how the Sovremennik came to be started by a band of students from the Moscow School; about the many impediments they had to face, narrating how at first they could not even get halls for rehearsal and were forced to rehearse at night when the halls became free. Their first play was "The Naked King", a satire on the Russian bureaucracy. This caught on and won popularity, giving them a breakthrough.

The play I saw in this theatre was "The Elder Sister" by A. Volodin, produced by O.N. Efremov. Though the play was new, it had rather a conventional theme. It showed two young sisters, the elder slogging at a desk job to provide a bright future for her younger sister whose great dream is to become an actress. Ironically, however, the panel interviewing the applicants for the stage prefers the elder to the younger. But she is persuaded by an elderly uncle to stick to her dull job for her sister's sake. The junior in the meantime becomes entangled in an unhappy affair with a married man which threatens to result in a break between the sisters. The elder, now feeling isolated, seeks an antidote by taking recourse to the stage. But the theatre people do not find the old artiste in her any longer. Some intrinsic element of her personality appears to have become lost by her submerging herself in a soundless routine and an environment which does not provide scope for her creative talent. But undaunted, by successive heroic efforts, she makes a breakthrough to success on the stage. In the meantime the younger sister has a change of heart and breaks with the married man and so all is well.

For the entire production there was actually only one setting, a room used for all the scenes with a few variations. It represents the one-room tenement, where everything practically in one's life happens and which is used by all who live there. One could not but be impressed by the utter simplicity and lightness of the production which had its own character with a very different flavour and was obviously quite inexpensive.

In the specialised field of the Children's Theatre, Russia occupies a high rank. Talking on the subject to Mr Z. Kovogodsky, Art Director of the Leningrad Children's Theatre, he told me; "The present-day theatre for children is important and its direction significant because it will have a hand in the growth of a new generation that will soon take our place. We must bear in mind one basic fact that the present-day life is far more complex than was ours, when we were children. Hence our responsibility lies in fulfilling our duty and task with this awareness. An error on our part, would be like that of a surgeon when performing an operation. The main difference between the adult theatre and that of the children is that, in the former, the writer, producer and actor can be just themsleves for they are talking and playing to their own kind, those of thier own age; while as part of the Children's Theatre, they have to cater to young minds. It is possible to do so, provided one does not pretend to be a child or a wise grown-up. Tolstoy very rightly said, talking on this point:

"The writer should never make himself write for the children, pretending to be a child himself. Children sense that immediately. Children want to be treated as grown-ups, want us to talk to them as equals which to them is a sign of our respect for them.

"The Children Theatre aims at telling the truth and does not believe in concealing. The plays are the channels that connect them with the realities of current life and stir the citizen in them.

"The play has to be measured by evaluating the children's normal concepts. It is therefore very important to evaluate them with exactness.

"While bearing in mind the educational value of the theatre and the mission of art, we should not think merely in terms of educational discipline. We must keep in mind the moral and aesthetic significance of a play, even while pursuing it as an educational medium to achieve a unity of the different aims. There has also to be the working in of the school and the theatre. The two have to form two wings of a single purpose and project. The success of much of this will, of course, depend on the materials we use — the plays and their production. That is why they have to be special and handled with imagination and care."

The Leningrad Children's Theatre, started in 1921 by A.A. Briantsev, a teacher and drama producer, was the first of its kind in Russia and probably one of the earliest anywhere in the world. He gathered round him a group who shared his ideals and aspirations, while he continued as the chief producer and director of this theatre. The basic underlying principle was education through art. The theatre was thus connected with the schools up to the secondary stage of education. The pupils are, however, divided into three sections, each with a special repertory. The first age group, which includes children up to four years, is catered to with fairy tales and simple stories. The second (five to seven years) are offered romantic and heroic themes designed to inspire the youngsters with idealism. The third consists of teenagers entering their youth. Here the themes have to take note of the concept of life the teenagers should form and the problems that confront and trouble them.

The division into age groups is considered important because of differences in the psychological make-up of each. It is easy to know what play a child likes or dislikes because children easily show their feelings without any inhibitions. There is a close link between the school and the theatre. The theatre staff has nine trained members, generally drawn from the humanities section. The liaison is also maintained through the Board of Teachers and the Board of Parents. The theatre has also an organisation of children known as the Children's Parliament. On it serve two student representatives from each Leningrad school. Thus all the institutions are directly connected with the theatre. Out of these, two representatives are chosen to look after the Parliament members, mainly to maintain discipline.

The actors that play in the shows for children are drawn from theatre schools and the theatre studio, the latter being part of the Children's Theatre. It was gifted by the State in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Pioneer movement. The present theatre is only five years old. It is not very large but designed to have a sense of spaciousness. It holds 100 seats but they are so built in a sloping hall that a spectator gets a good view from any seat and nobody is at a disadvantage. This in a way makes all of them equal in status, though the prices vary from 20 to 60 kopecks, the higher value ones being nearer the stage.

The plays have a fairly wide range including Russian and foreign classics. When I was visiting, "Don Quixote" was under production for the 350th year celebrations of Cervantes. I was shown the motto of the school which summed up its philosophy : Co-operation between artists thinking as teachers and teachers with the feeling of artists.

I had occasion to see two shows in the Children's Theatre, each totally different in theme, treatment and presentation. One was in the Central Children's Theatre, Moscow, and consisted of the folk tales, "The Hut" and "The Goat" written by S.G. Marshak and directed by Dudin, the People's Artist. The decor was by Dmitriev, Merited Artist Laureate of the State.

"The Hut" was a very simple story about animals. A frog lived by itself peacefully in its home, a hut. Slowly this idyllic existence began to be constantly disturbed by the arrival of other animals. First came a mouse seeking shelter, which the generous frog readily gave. Then followed a cock, later a hedgehog, all of whom in turn were welcomed by the frog and the other inmates. But later there followed a different species of animals also begging for shelter, a fox, a wolf, and a bear. Now, however, the hut-dwellers refused to take them in. Then ensued a battle of wits as also of force, the new arrivals trying to push their way in, and the dwellers trying to keep them out. But each manoeuvre of the tricky animals was met by a counter-manoeuvre and the ding-dong contest enlivened the suspense and excitement of the children who lived through every nuance of the moves until they jubilantly rejoiced in the victory of the frog and its friends.

The other story, "The Goat", had an unusual opening, which perhaps is a reflection of the old Indian drama. Two wise men came on the stage and started discussing what play to present to the child audience, very much the way the Sutradhara discusses with his wife or friend in Indian drama. Apart from talking amongst themselves, they also addressed questions to the children to get their reaction. It was a very lively prelude to the play soon to open. Finally, the two decided on the story of the Goat. But one of them told the audience that unfortunately it had a tragic ending which would sadden the child spectators. He would try however to give it a pleasant ending.

A couple living in the woods had grown old and feeble and could hardly fend for themselves. A sprighty young goat, watching them fumbling through daily chores, was filled with compassion and came to their assistance. Their pitiful life was soon transformed into one of gladness and ease with the addition of the kindly goat, who now relieved them of their daily burdens by performing the jobs itself. But soon tragedy overtook this happy family. While out in the woods, busy gathering mushrooms, nuts and fuel, the goat was grabbed by a pack of wolves. When the day ended without the return of the goat, the old folks racked with fear, went out looking for their faithful friends and were overwhelmed by grief when they stumbled on the remains of the goat. But to make it "all's well that ends well," the dead goat was however brought back to life, and children adore miracles anyway, especially when they are wrought to right an injustice.

The other play I witnessed in the Leningrad Children's Theatre was entirely different in every way and was called "Oleco Duncich" after the hero in the drama, a Yugoslav soldier. It was a grim drama set in the turbulent days of World War I and the Russian Revolution. Before seeing the play I thought it a strange theme for children. No doubt the group to which it was performed belonged to this the higher age category. Nevertheless it seemed a harsh plot for youngsters.

With the establishment of the Bolshevik regime, a Yugoslav unit fighting in Russia was released. Normally the soldiers would have left the country. But Oleco, one of the leaders in this unit, felt great sympathy with the Bolsheviks, who were struggling against foreign as well as internal enemies, and wanted his compatriots to throw in their lot with the Russian revolutionaries. A section at the top resisted, he was arrested and detained but finally he was out and gained his heart's desire. What might otherwise have been a dull and drab affair, was made into a lively show the children could enter into, understand and enjoy.

The play had one basic setting, a ship's prow, for the entire play. Some scenes were on the deck, some below. The whole ship never came into view, but the position of the prow where the main drama was enacted, was shifted to suit each scene. The auditorium was also used for the soldiers to walk through, file up, etc. Where a structure like a mansion or quarters had to be shown, an arch was raised on the ship's deck with steps leading up to it. Different and very ingenious effects were achieved by the manner in which this arch was placed. When it stood straight in front of the audience, it did duty for a gateway. When it was placed at an angle it became the archway of a mansion. When it stood on the deck, it served to create the impression of a balcony, from which the actors watched the people walking below and talked to them or the audience. With this single setting, a number of episodes were enacted, the scenes themselves set in different places from a battleground to a ballroom, a nurse's quarter to a military headquarters, from the intimacy of a home to a street scene. The scenic changes had to be very quick for the drama moved very fast. At times it was as though a magic wand was waved and a transformation was brought about.

The Russian Children's Theatre seems to have a charm and flavour all its own, both in the style of the narrative and in presentation. One of the masterpieces is the "Ramayana" and the way this epic has been handled is illustrative of this quality. Rarely has this highly dramatic tale been presented in such a moving way. The children enter into the episodes so completely that they almost become part of the drama. For instance, the scene where Ravana comes to snatch away Sita and she is about to go beyond the circle she is forbidden to cross: the children in the audience get so agitated that they call out to her in great anxiety during the scene and then bemoan her lapse when Ravana carries her away.

Mysticism in Sri Aurobindo

Sisirkumar Ghose

A promise and a presence, Mysticism, the next higher development or the beyonding of man, is a distinct human possibility. All men have it, if not in equal measure. Piercing the planes, mysticism represents a perennial possibility, mankind's rebirth on a higher level. Simply, the mystic is a mutant of a completer manifestation, Man to Be. Without mysticism man is but an unfinished animal, a somnambulist animal in a theatre of the absurd. Since men in the mass cannot bear its pressure, mysticism has remained something odd and apart, something abnormal. It is not easy to normalise the numinous. A balanced mysticism, such as Sri Aurobindo's is the hope of the future The case of the mystic is a little ambivalent: he has been honoured as well as hounded, but rarely understood. The secret of his inner life remains a secret. Not an unexamined life, it might, one day, be an open secret. We are always free to be free.

Based on self-determination rather than on determinism, there is something for ever contemporary about mysticism. This is a quality that it shares with poetry. Mysticism is the poetry of poetry because it is the life of life. The message is basic and, in today's context of crisis, even urgent. Without its help man may soon become a cosmic dropout, an evolutionary failure. As Gopi Krishna put it, mysticism is the target of evolution.

It has no essential quarrel with science. A unified field theory could be a bridge, the hypothesis. Is not modern science moving towards a Vedantic, that is, a mystical affirmation? This is what Sri Aurobindo had foreseen long back. What have his states of altered awareness to tell us? What is the Autobiography of the yogi like?

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II

A major, mature, modern mystic, Sri Aurobindo has enriched our enlightenment potential in several significant ways. Integral, evolutionary, transformative, his defence and display of visionary experience, especially Vedic, is nonpareil. A Veda-reviver, a role he admits, the cognitive aspect is ever kept in view. A knowledge that matters, Mysticism is not a thing of the past. On the contrary it alone guarantees a viable future. No yoga no evolution. Hence the global revival of interest. The timeless truths have turned out to be timely. An unborn godhead calls to us.

With good reason Sri Aurobindo refers to himself "as a mystic". His Messages of August 15, 1947, and of 1949 (to America) are written from a mystical point of view. All his major works bear the mark of the mystical and the visionary. *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga* are built on strong mystical foundations. His ontic Odyssey, *Savitri* is an encyclopaedia of mystical experiences, "Where all are different and all is one". Life he has called a "Mystic Miracle", a fathomless consciousness beyond the mind's norm. As he sees it, man is destined to find his real self and the full possibility of his being. In fact his expert exposition of man's self-unfolding gives the subject a new turn, a new hope for man. In particular he has corrected the ascetic or other-worldly tendency of the Indian psyche. In the Aurobindean dispensation an individual salvation is not enough, not the final end. The individual is the centre but not the circumference of the change hoped for. The change is not only for the ego, but for all, for earth-nature as he calls it. This is a dream that not many have dared to dream and none with such details, commitment and authority, the authority of maturity.

But more than the theory of mysticism it is the lived reality that impresses more. With Sri Aurobindo mysticism has come of age. The manner in which he has related Yoga, the evolution of consciousness, with mysticism is a sign of his originality. As he underlines it, an increase of the power or powers of consciousness is not only possible but inevitable. The mature person, the total man, cannot but be mystical, though every mystic may not be mature. May be as its unified consciousness evolves, mysticism could be the norm of the future. For the crisis of man and society what other therapy is there? A willed mutation of the species, mysticism is the meaning of man. Nothing else will satisfy man's search for the roots, "the roots above", as the Veda says.

He had always taken yogic or mystical truths, their centrality in the Indian view of life, for granted. But it was in the wake of his Vedic studies at Pondicherry that the subject takes an unmistakable turn. He had noticed certain parallels between his own yogic experiences and those cryptically recorded in the Vedas. He found clues to the treasure which explained their true meaning and the awe and reverence shown to the early knowers, the Ancestors. It was as though, after centuries, a veil had lifted. Based on a kinship in perception, his exposition of the secret of the Veda easily surpasses every other. The reason is simple : like the original authors he too is a poet and mystic. As he has said in *The Life Divine*, the consciousness of the seer is greater than the consciousness of the thinker. And what did he find ? Not primitive, sacrificial hymns, for earthly gains addressed to physical Nature, as Western critics had once thought, but a source book of wisdom, a mass of inspired poetry about man, universe and that Nature which is to us still a Supernature. There is revealed to the prophet eye a vast hierarchy and hinterland of interlocking worlds, a hidden teleology of the world-process. Going behind the surface of the 'lower hemisphere' the seers had found a deeper self, an inner being. A renewable, ontological enterprise, their self-image remains a supreme invention, an abiding achievement. To explore the possibility of his further becoming is man's highest business, his ultimate and inevitable preoccupation. It is part of other discoveries. Secret powers of Nature, godheads, were revealed to them. The science of the Self—know thyself—was an open secret to the 'people of the hidden'. The knowledge, hard thing, was reached only along the razor's edge. Without test and training, it was not advisable to enter the Path, full of terrors and temptation, of hostile forces that are more than metaphorical. The house of man harbours not merely god and angel. There are denizens of the deep, "children of the gulf", able and eager to retain their hold.

This was one reason for the deliberate disguise of its imaged language, symbols that could be at the same time of a journey, a battle or a pilgrim-sacrifice. His decoding of the symbol systems—"a mystic Morse"—shows his affinity with the archaic thought, experience and language. the ritual and its reality, the *yajna* and its object, to invoke the gods, through Agni, the heart's fire, the seer-will, stand out. It was through the *vyahrtis* that he recovered the Vedic cosmology, more veridical than outward facing. Every level of consciousness, and there are several, represents a world. The physical is not the only 'field'. Man is a meeting-ground of levels of reality. There are expanding universes known to the mystic's expanded states of awareness. All the worlds have their entry here.

Where are these worlds and why were created and by whom? Here Sri Aurobindo points to a momentous reversal of values, one of the essential mysteries of mystical maturity. "Man, subjectively, contains within himself all the worlds in which, objectively, he is contained". All the cosmic hierarchies are copied in our secret air of self. Though the order and the number vary, as a rule seven planes or principles, the sevenfold chords of the being, are admitted: Existence, Consciousness and Bliss make the higher hemisphere; Mind, Life and Matter the lower, with Swar or Mahas, the supramental world of Truth, as the link between the two. The gods, active powers behind the veil, who built the worlds, build these in the human psyche to aid the return to godhead. This is the Upward Journey or the Way of Return. To be a Veda-knower is to participate in the god-man drama, or dialogue; sons of God, we must be even as He. Only so do we move from mortality to Immortality, to ("the call of some unfulfilled beyond") the "solar glories beyond the Mind". Every man has to find the truth of his being within himself, on his own. Those that do not are dropouts of evolution, marked 'missing' in the register of souls. The human condition is a crisis or a borderland situation, wrapped up in a paradox: "Our life is a paradox with God for key." As Sri Aurobindo sees it, this contrast between the mortality we are the immortal condition to which we can aspire is the key to Vedic thought and practice. The best summary of the human aspiration will be found in the perennial prayer: lead me from the Unreal to the Real, from the Darkness to the Light, from Death to Immortality. The questor's courage to be creative, to remake ourselves in the divine image, harks back to an occult view of the Meaning of Man. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* we hear him say: "Man is precisely that term and symbol of a higher Existence descended into the mortal world in which it is possible for the lower to transfigure itself and put on the nature of the higher and the higher to reveal itself in the forms of the lower." Amphibian man is the link between two worlds, betweem the infra-rational and the supra-rational. "Reason was the helper, reason is the bar." The heart of the Vedic ethos, mysticism is the art and science of the Ascent of Man. The ascension, the beyonding, already effected by the Ancients, is open to their descendants. To justify the ways of mysticism is not irrational. Though more interested in its practice than its theory, Sri Aurobindo's essay, "The Doctrine of the Mystics", is a remarkable résumé, an insider's view.

III

His exposition of the Doctrine of the mystics shows exceptional empathy. But Sri Aurobindo's work is not confined to exposition. He brings matching experience. In his later sonnets and even more in *Savitri* he has not only re-lived but refashioned it in the lyric and epic modes respectively, the mystic universe, it's centre and circumference. A rare record of yogic truths—"the living truth of you", as he has said in "A God's Labour"—their ease and universality are striking. In speaking for himself he speaks for every one ready to rise. "Even in rags I am a god; Fallen, I am divine". In the mystical enterprise one of the first things to happen is a release from the ego, this-man-so-and-so. "No one I am, I who am all that is". Again: "I have learned a close identity with all, yet am by nothing bound that I become". It is his cosmic consciousness that enables the poet to say: "The universe is my stupendous whole." "I contain the whole world in my soul's embrace... I see my body with another's face." From his 'imperishable home' above, descends, through several psyche centres (*chakras*), a golden light, "an amazement of light", till "My earth is thy playfield and thy seat". The "inner war without escape' is part of the play: "And yet I know my footprints track shall be a pathway towards Immortality". The soul's journey, the miracle of birth, is an open book to the seer:

I saw my soul a traveller through time
    From life to life in the cosmic ways it trod...
Still by slow decrees the miracle goes on,
    The Immortal's birth mid mire and stone.

The impression deepens in *Savitri* and its Vedic theme: "the end of Death, the death of Ignorance." In the search of a lost wisdom, never wholly lost, the traveller of the worlds gains "knowledge enormous":

Immortal our forgotten vastnesses
Await discovery in our summit selves...

A wide God-knowledge poured down from above,
A new world-knowledge broadened from within,
His daily thoughts looked up to the True and One.
He read the text of the without from within.

Insight, balance and integrality are marks of the Aurobindean mysticism, his capacity for experience, a novel normality. Mysticism *à la* Sri Aurobindo is not for odd, sick souls. Nor is it confined to glimpses and or sensations. Whether a willed change of status, or an act of Grace, it represents another way of seeing and being. A part of holistic living, it is the More that we must become. Without innerness, the mystic *donnée*, this is not possible. Altogether he has projected a new hero, the Total Man. Aware of the levels, mysticism alone knows how to make the fragment-being whole. An absolute analogy puts the matter straight: "Brahman is integral and unifies many states of consciousness at a time; we also, manifesting the nature of Brahman, should become integral and all-embracing." In the sheer totality of his "all-embracing" grasp he provides a new paradigm. Mysticism is not a diet of sensations but food for grown-ups. In the adventure of consciousness few have greatened us from within as he has done. Encyclopaedist of enlightenment, he has brought back the lost language of ecstasy within reach.

A basic or characteristic theme of Aurobindean mysticism is Transformation. On this, "the slow prelude of a vaster theme", he has written at length in both prose and poetry. A higher power than mind is needed to change human nature. Transformation is the finale of his futurist vision, his optimistic ontology. "Our god-head calls us in unrealised things." In his poem, "Transformation", he tells us:

I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
  A slave to Nature and her leaden rules;
I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.

My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
  My body is God's happy living tool,
My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

Differently phrased, we hear of the descent of light in "A God's Labour", a beautiful confession of faith.

I have gathered my dreams in a silver air
  Between the gold and the blue
And wrapped them softly and left them there
  My jewelled dreams of you.

I had hoped to build a rainbow bridge
  Marrying the soil to the sky
And sow in this dancing planet midge
  The moods of infinity.

But too bright our heavens, too far away;
  Too frail their ethereal stuff;
Too splendid and sudden our light could not stay;
  The roots were not deep enough...

The gulf between the depths and the heights is bridged
  And the golden waters pour

Down the sapphire mountain ridged rainbow -
And glimmering from shore to shore...

A little more and the new life's doors
Shall be carved in silver light
With its aureate roof and mosaic floors
In a great world bare and bright.

I shall leave my dreams in their argent air,
For in a raiment of gold and blue
There shall move on the earth embodied and fair
The living truth of you.

Change your life, the statue of Apollo had told Rilke. A shower of samadhis, Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* does exactly that. To read *Savitri* is to suffer sea-change. Humanity awakened to its deepest self, and mysticism is but a form of awakening, the miracle is fulfilled at last: "The miracle for which our life was made." The human journey gets a new focus and function. "Till he has found himself he cannot pause." His march is a battle and a pilgrimage.

And never can the mystic traveller rest
And never can the mystic voyage cease.
Till the nescient dusk is lifted from man's soul
And the morns of God have overtaken his night.

The climax of Aurobindean mysticism is in "Rose of God", his gift outright to the English language. *Apologia pro vita sua*, here is a proof of his theory of poetry as a *mantra* of the Real. Vibrating with nuances of the alchemic dream, the Vedic passion to unite Earth and Heaven, Spirit and Matter, it is his Hymn to the Mystic Fire, "ablaze in the will of the mortal". In Sri Aurobindo mysticism, we repeat, has come of age. The poet who is also a Rishi has returned to "make deathless the children of Time." Soul on fire, he has written the Veda of a New Age, the Life Divine :

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate
divine Desire,
Rose of Life, crowded with petals, colours' lyre!
Transform the body of the mortal, like a sweet
and magical rhyme,
Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless
the children of Time.

If this is not mysticism, what is?

A treasurer of superhuman dreams, he has scattered his bounty. Even a little of it is enough to save, enough to remake us in the image of godhead. In the varieties of Aurobindean mysticism there is something for every one, everything for some.

Testimony of an Indian Vulture

Vilas Sarang

It's been four days now since one of my wings was disabled. The wing isn't completely broken, so it's not totally useless. I can move it, though with great difficulty. I can even fly a little, but it hurts, it hurts.

I've been put in this condition by nothing other than the irrational, unreasonable behavior of human beings like you. Four days ago, along with a dozen other vultures, I was feeding on a dead cow in the barren plain on the outskirts of town. We were competing for the best morsels, grabbing whatever we could. Engrossed in the feast, we didn't even notice a youth passing by who picked up a stone from the path and hurled it in our direction. The stone hit me right on the joint of my left wing. The sudden, unbearable pain of that vicious blow caused me to drop the sizeable piece of intestine that I held in my beak and try to fly away. Trying to fly made the pain even worse, so I gave up the attempt and just started hopping along. Some of my fellow diners also rose up in the air in alarm. But when they saw that the youth who had hurled the missile was continuing nonchalantly on his way, they resumed their meal. I remained standing alone, gazing at the man walking away from the scene. What was it that drove him to pick up that stone and throw it? He obviously had no material interest in the dead cow. I know that some of you humans eat cows, even cows that have died of natural causes. But the carcass we were devouring had already begun to rot, and I'm sure no human, however famished, would have touched it. So what harm was there in a flock of hungry vultures who had decided to put the abandoned carcass to good use? The man had no good reason to throw the stone that rendered one of my wings practically useless. That's the sort of thing you humans do — and yet you complain about the irrationality of the universe.

Indian Horizons Vol. XXXVI Nos. 3—4, 1987

Dragging my broken wing, I hopped towards a tree, a tall tree standing alone in the middle of the bare plain. I somehow managed to fly up and land on a branch. This is my favourite tree. I love to sit on its topmost branch, enjoying a bird's-eye view of the surrounding emptiness. Now, with one of my wings crippled, I had to be content with clinging to one of its lowest branches.

I sat on that branch all day. My companions, having finished their meal, had flown away. Who wants to stay around someone who has been disabled by misfortune? That's the way of the world, and inescapable solitude was now my lot. I accepted it, and waited patiently for my wing to heal. I spent two full days sitting in the same spot, but the wing showed no sign of improving. Once, when I was younger, it would have healed in no time. But I've grown old, and my bones and limbs have lost their former vigour. You may ask, why should an aged vulture stretch his wings? But I wasn't the sort of bird to croak Nevermore. I wanted to live, I wanted to live. Circling high in the sky, surveying the meaningless complexity of human life, I still wanted to seek my nourishment.

When it became clear that the wing wouldn't heal, I started to wonder what I should do next. Then I remembered the bird hospital in town. We vultures only knew of this hospital by hearsay. I had learned that it was run by a doctor who belonged to the Jain sect. I am, of course, aware that the majority of people in our country are Hindus, and that they set great store by humanitarianism; I also know that the Jains champion humanitarianism and non-violence even more fervently. It was undoubtedly on the basis of such noble ideals that the Jain doctor set up an exclusive hospital for birds. And a highly praiseworthy idea it was.

From our viewpoint as vultures, though, there was a grave lacuna in the idea behind the hospital: it was open only to herbivorous birds. Carnivorous birds such as crows, kites and vultures were strictly excluded. Pretty little birds like pigeons and sparrows were looked after with great care at the hospital. Circling above the hospital out of curiosity, I had often observed what went on inside through the windows. Patients were housed in little pigeon-holes, some with broken wings, or injured legs, some with other maladies. They were given appropriate medical treatment, and food and water, then released from the hospital windows, or from its terrace, when they recovered. I had often watched pigeons and sparrows flying away happily from the hospital. Although I knew that this privilege was not available to vultures, I had never taken it much to heart; strong and healthy all my life, I never thought that I would ever need the services of the hospital.

Things were different now. I was disabled, and the thought of the Jain doctor's hospital kept coming back to me. Was there no chance for me to find admittance there ? Wouldn't the good doctor's heart melt with pity when he saw my condition ? As the hours passed, and the pain in my wing increased, I felt more and more confident that I would receive treatment at the hospital. The logic of social organization is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a creature that wants to go on living.

The hospital was a long way from my tree. I would have to pass through streets flanked by many houses to get there. Since I couldn't fly that far, I decided to try it late at night. When I felt certain that the town had gone to sleep, I descended from my tree, and, taking cover from time to time, hopping mostly, but also flying now and then, I reached the hospital. I flopped up and over the wall with some difficulty, landed inside the enclosure, and crouched under a shrub in the darkness.

The sun came up, and after a while the doctor arrived. I gave him time to go on his daily rounds. When I saw that he was almost finished, I gathered all my strength and flew up and perched at one of the windows. The windows had no bars, but I didn't have the courage to fly straight in. It wouldn't help me anyway, I thought. Checking the condition of his patients one by one, the doctor stopped right under the window where I sat. He didn't notice me, busy as he was with his work, leaning over his patients. So, with great care, I made as soft and friendly a sound as possible. The doctor gave a start, and looked up. I could read the anger, the astonishment, and the revulsion written upon his face.

"Shoo — Shoo," the doctor shouted, gesticulating in my direction.

"Please listen, Doctor —," I said in a tone of supplication.

"Shoo — Shoo — go away !" the doctor shouted again.

"Doctor — Doctor — please hear me out —".

"Hey, anyone over there ? Will someone get me a stick, please ?" the doctor said, turning to his right. But both his assistants seemed to be out of hearing.

Realizing that I'd better state my case quickly, I said in haste, "Please listen to me, Doctor — I haven't come to your hospital looking for food. I'm not going to harm your pigeons and sparrows. I've come as a patient — as a patient !"

The doctor continued to glower at me.

"Look, Doctor — look at my wing !" I spread my injured wing, ignoring the stab of pain that shot through my body as I did so. "Look ! It's injured. I think a bone's broken." I noted that, almost involuntarily, the doctor had looked towards my wing, and that the anger in his eyes seemed to have diminished slightly. Encouraged, I said in an optimistic voice, "It hurts a lot, Doctor. And if my wing is permanently crippled, how can I stay alive? Will you treat me, Doctor — please?"

"No way!" the doctor shouted, throwing an arm into the air. "We don't take in birds of your kind. Go away, go away!"

"Please don't say that, Doctor", I pleaded again. "You're so compassionate towards birds. You've been performing such an invaluable service for them. And am I not a bird too, Doctor? Then why treat me like a step-child?"

"You — you eat filth — meat — any kind of meat — rats, dogs, cattle, anything! — ugh!"

"Yes, Doctor, I do. I can't deny that. But you won't throw me out just because my food is different, will you? Such hard-hearted treatment just because of what I eat?"

"Go away! I don't want to hear any more! Keep your wisdom to yourself!" the doctor cried out, his anger rising even higher.

Without lessening the cordiality in my voice, I continued arguing doggedly, "Just think it over a bit, Doctor. When you get right down to it, it really doesn't matter who eats what, not at all. Pigeons and sparrows eat grain, while we eat flesh — it's all *maya*, all illusion. Everything is one at the bottom of this world of illusion."

"Ah! So now you're teaching me philosophy, eh!" the doctor said with scornful irony. "Very clever, eh? Well, I've had enough of it. Get out, I say, get out!"

Making a last effort I pleaded, "All right, Doctor. Don't admit me as an in-patient if you don't want to. But won't you at least treat me as an out-patient? If you'll do that, Doctor, I'll never forget your kindness for the rest of my life."

"Ugh — a filthy creature like you!" the doctor said, turning up his nose. "I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. Go now, go. How stubborn can you be!"

Just then one of the doctor's assistants entered the hall. "Go get me a stick!" the doctor ordered. I saw that instead of receiving medical treatment, there was a possibility I'd end up with a few extra broken bones, and decided to beat a retreat. I flew down from the window, reached the hospital wall, flapped over it, and, dodging people, somehow got out of town.

Now I'm back at my perch in the tree. My mind is filled with sadness. But this sadness is not just for myself, it's for you humans too. I pity you now more than I ever did before. So many things have created dissension among you. But should a simple thing like food divide you too? I believe no other country in the world is like ours in this respect. In other countries almost everyone eats flesh; it's only our country that's divided into those who eat meat and those who don't. It's most unfortunate. Tell me, what hope can you have for a country where food divides people? Can such a society ever prosper?

Sitting on one of the lowest branches of my favourite tree, I contemplate such questions. My weariness increases hour by hour, and the pain in my wing seems to be spreading throughout my body. It seems I may not remain in this world much longer. I wonder what I'll be in my next life. All I ask of the Lord is that I'm not reborn in this same country as a man.

It's evening now, and the western horizon is radiant with orange and purple stripes. The sky is darkening rapidly. It's one of those immemorial Indian evenings. There's no sign of the moon anywhere. Perhaps she will rise late, or perhaps it is the night of the dark moon. Gazing upon the darkening emptiness of the plain at this somber hour an unaccustomed sense of peace steals over me. I have a feeling that it may be on this dark night that my soul will take wing, soaring high and free in the sky.

(Translated from the Marathi by the author and Breon Mitchell)

SANTA DATTA 1982

In the Land of the Dead

(An Assamese short story written by *Devabrata Das*)

I have been discharged from the public hospital this morning. I am now waiting on a stretcher, on the hospital verandah, waiting to be escorted back home. The condition of my health is now beyond repair. I could easily detect the emptiness of the doctors' promises that I would recover even faster at home. As one grows old, one's senses become keener. That is how I could tell that the doctors were lying to me. In fact, it is the hopelessness of my condition that had forced the doctors to release me from the hospital.

Nobody from my family has come to the hospital to escort me back home. My sons have sent the old car with the driver. The car had developed certain mechanical defects on its way to hospital. So Rahmat, the driver told me that it would take a little time to repair the car. Rahmat had already hired a mechanic to set right the defects. So, I am waiting now, on this hospital verandah, lying on the stretcher to be taken back home.

A few persons arrived at the hospital carrying a dead body. They placed the body not far away from me; and immediately they dispersed in different directions possibly to locate a doctor, a nurse or a compounder who were nowhere to be seen. A terrible stench emanated from the dead body and attacked my nostrils. I looked towards the body. No it wasn't a dead body at all. In fact it was a dying man, a living skeleton : a frame of bare bones over which was stretched a shrivelled and moth-eaten skin. His nearness made me very uncomfortable and angry too. This Rahmat is taking a long time. But I cannot do anything to get afar from this foul smelling wretched bastard. I have been paralysed. I cannot move around by myself. For the rest of my life, I am doomed to lie on my bed, completely at the mercy of others to help me do even my daily chores.

Indian Horizons Vol. XXXVI Nos. 3—4, 1987

A mobile cart carrying meals for the inmates of the hospital was being pushed through the verandah by a few wardboys. The variety of smells from overcooked rice, halfbaked curries and the creaking noise of the cart made everyone nearby take notice. The living skeleton left on the verandah near me promptly sat up and started begging "Give me a little dal-bhat, please I am very very hungry." He produced an aluminium dish from nowhere and received whatever the wardboys deigned to offer. And how fast he ate. Within seconds the hungry skeleton devoured whatever little he was given and in no time wiped the plate clean. After finishing his meal with noticeable relish he turned towards me and said:

"Actually, I have no illness. I am not sick at all. It was only lack of food. I don't even remember the last time when I could eat a bellyfull. I was lying on the roadside out of sheer exhaustion, when these good samaritans discovered me, and dragged me to this place".

"You have no family? No home?"

"No, I am a footpath man, a beggar. Like most of my fellow countrymen. In my country the majority of the population do not have a house. Do not have a family. Do you have any?"

I replied in the affirmative. But the beggar refused to believe me. He found it impossible to digest the fact that a person with such a big and rich family should be left stranded on a public hospital verandah a forlorn, lonely, helpless figure lying horizontal on a stretcher, unattended by anybody.

While I was talking with the skeleton, a few other skeletons reached the hospital. Most of them could not be admitted or given shelter in the hospital and so were left stranded on the verandah itself in our company. After a long time Rahmat appeared near me and rescued me from the land of skeletons, the land of the beggars, the land of the dead.

My four darling sons have contributed a fair lot to transforming our country into a land of the dead or a land of beggars. Of course, I am also to blame for their upbringing.

I was in politics once. Long before the country's independence I had joined Gandhiji's non-violence movement. Funny, though now it seems, but I was also a part of the "satyagraha" movement. A movement in search of truth, honesty and freedom from bondage.

The country was free at last. Gandhiji's dream had come true. The country progressed under new leaders. Gandhiji and his idealism were left behind in pursuit of transient and immediate glory. I also became part of the process. Under the new breed of leaders like me it was time for sham-development at all costs.

Affluence without any questions being asked. No one was there to question the process. As a result, the country turned poorer and poorer gradually, whereas a handful of powerful people, a few scores of business people and a large number of corrupt bureaucrats became richer and richer. I was also one of the select few who amassed a sizeable fortune alongwith the others. My sons were also brought up in this changing atmosphere. The old values of society were soon forgotten. My sons learnt from me that nothing mattered more than one's own well-being. The family first and the family last. The family coffers are to be filled with wealth by hook or by crook. The rest of the country may go to the dogs.

Soon my sons attained maturity. They also proved to be the worthy sons of a worthy father. The first son followed my path. Unable to pass his B.A. exams he soon joined the whirlpool of politics, emerging as a leader of tomorrow. He soon learnt the usefulness of underhand deals. Now he owns almost one-third of the second most prosperous market in town. Not only this, but the strings of a lot of public funds are tied to his fingertips. These funds which are supposed to help better the lot of the vast majority of the people living under the poverty line have come in very handy in filling his own family coffers and those of his political friends.

My second son is a wholesale trader in foodgrains. His motto is more and more profits through adulteration. He distributes not only the basic food materials among the needy public but also the basic germs of incurable diseases among them. Thus pushing the unsuspecting public faster towards their sickbeds my worthy son has made his bank balance healthier and healthier every day.

The third son is a doctor. The medicines purchased for dispensation at the public hospitals are routed to the market place through his machinations. He also deals in spurious drugs killing millions of patients throughout the country without the slightest pangs of conscience. While the dead bodies increase in number my son's riches also increase manifold.

My fourth son deals in skeletons. While the country is going to the dogs, while my first three sons collectively are helping the common people to embrace death much earlier than they deserve, when the dead bodies are increasing in number everywhere, my fourth darling son revels in commercial delight. More dead bodies means more business for him. More dead bodies means more skeletons. More skeletons means more exports. Yes, my fourth son exports skeletons to foreign countries and earns unthinkable profits. Thanks to leaders like me, politicians, traders, businessmen and doctors like my sons, there is never any dearth of dead bodies in our country. So my last son is prospering in his business day by day.

All of my sons are happy. All four of them have happy families. All of them are busy making money. More and more money. They are all so very busy that not one son of mine could spare a little time to come to the hospital to escort me back home. Not even one son of mine came. Only the old driver Rahmat and our old car was sent. Such negligence is difficult to tolerate. So I decided that I should die. I died only a few days later at home.

Now I am on my way to my grave. People of my persuasion bury their dead. Many people have joined my funeral procession. All of my sons have found time to accompany me on this my last journey to the graveyard. But not a single one of them look really sorry to see me die. I know the tears in their eyes are crocodile tears. They are there only for the people to see. They are not real tears.

"So you have died after all".

A beggar walking beside my dead body was talking to me. I would recognise him fairly well even though he looked as anonymous as any of the beggars in town. He was the deadbody I had met in the hospital verandah. He was the skeleton who found it hard to believe that I was not a baggar like himself; that I had my own family, my riches, my own home quite unlike him. I was surprised to find him in my funeral procession. I asked, "Why have you come to my funeral procession? You don't even know me well. What right do you have to show grief over my death?"

"No, no: No grief. On the other hand I am very happy. I have come only to see your house. I have no interest in joining your funeral procession".

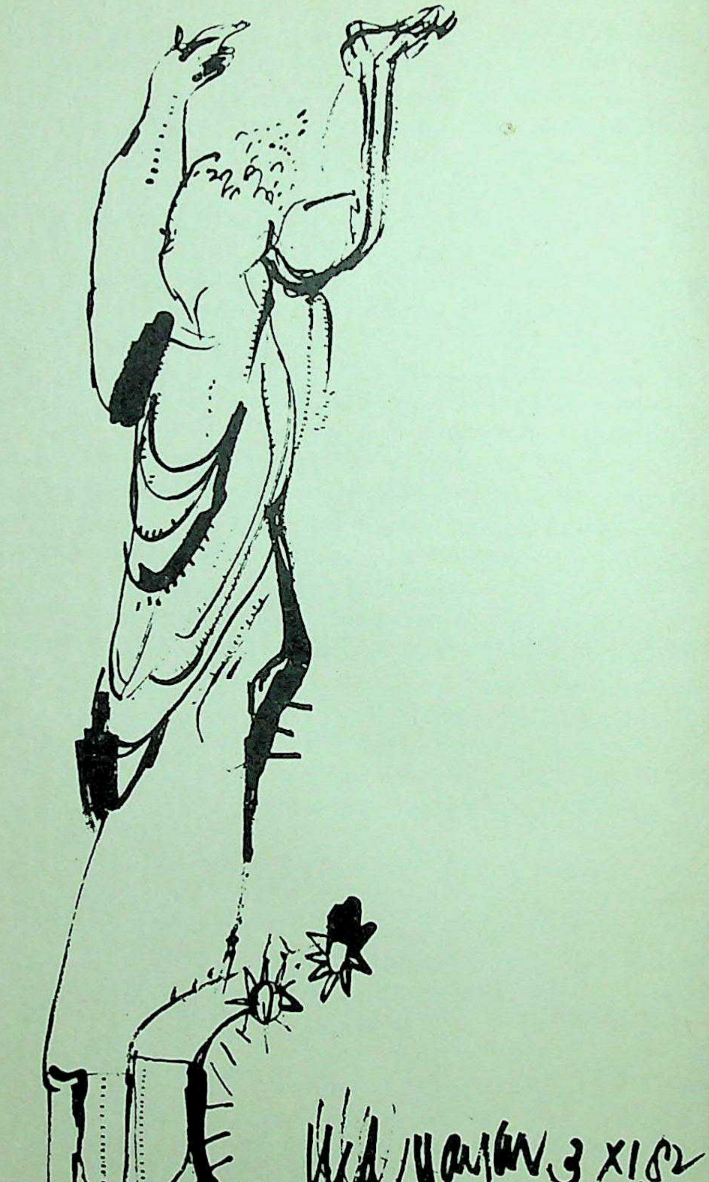
"And why this sudden interest in my house, if I am permitted to ask?"

"Oh, sure, sure. You can alway ask. Actually it is my duty to go and visit the houses of all the dead people who have died recently. You know, the religious rites call for the relatives to throw a dinner party on the fortieth day after the death; Chalisa, you know. Now if we don't recognise your house how shall we come to enjoy your Chalisa feast? That is why I have come. Not out of grief but out of anticipation of a grand feast of 'pulao, parathas, tasty side-dishes and what not. Ah ha: How long it is since I joined a good Chalisa feast! You people seem to be quite rich. So the feast should be equally good! I am so happy that after forty days I'll have a nice feast. I shall eat licking my fingers to the knuckles! Great!"

I was very angry with him. Here I was on my way to the graveyard leaving all my near and dear ones and all my riches for good. And this bastard is dancing in glee only because he is assured of a sumptuous feast at my house at my expense after forty days. What right does he have to act in such a disgraceful manner on a day of mourning? Look at his joy! Look at him dancing near my funeral bed! Wait, wait, you bastard! Even you don't have a lot of time. Look at yourself. You are nothing but skin and bones. A living skeleton. That's what you are. You too will die soon. Then my son will dig you out of the grave and skin you from top to bottom. Then he will send your bones to a country far, far away. Wait, I shall introduce you to my son. My fourth son who deals in skeletons. He will keep a tab on you. He will follow you everywhere. He will not let you live in peace till you die. Then he will grab you like a Dracula and he will suck your blood. From your grave you will be dug out. Your bones will be auctioned. Wait. Wait you bastard, I'll call my fourth son and deliver you to him.

From where I lay, in the forefront of the procession, I looked for my fourth son. I did not have to search for long. He was right behind me. But.. O God! What is this? Why this queer look in his eyes? Why do his eyes look so greedy when they focus on my dead body? My god! Is he considering even his old father's dead body, his own father's skeleton as a future business investment? Will he not allow even his own father's body to lie peacefully in the grave after his death?

(Translated into English by the author)


Badri Narayan, 3 XI.82

Book Reviews

Landscapes
Keki N. Daruwalla
Oxford University Press, Delhi pp. 72, Rs 30

Selected Poems
Jayanta Mahapatra
Oxford University Press, Delhi pp. 78, Rs 35

Collected Poems (1957-1987)
Dom Moraes
Penguin Books Private Ltd., New Delhi, pp. 167, Rs 55

All three of these Indo-English poets have made a name for themselves on the literary scene. Jayanta Mahapatra was a late starter, but since has been a fast sprinter — having already published half a score volumes of verse, considering that the first of these appeared as recently as in the mid seventies! From its very beginnings his poetic voice impressed one with its genuineness. Perhaps genuineness is not quite the word to describe it; rather, that he seems to have been writing out of an urgent personal need: an imbalance with the immediate, physical-cum-spiritual environment being the initial condition which, then, was to mutate into the still, sad music of his verse — as the blurb of his book describes it. By and large, this music is unvarying, little rise, and no fall, in pitch, tone, volume or what have you.

If I remember aright it was only in one of his poems (not included in the present volume) that the Mahapatrian monologue snapped, to make way for an address to a fellow poet. Here the mood had become a trifle impatient, a little sarcastic, but for the rest the poet's anima does not seem to put up any outwardly noticeable resistance to what makes it suffer so very much. This anima is content with whatever is — in one way almost resigned to what appears an unchanging mileu. This keeping of his volition under harness, in the given psychic circumstances, makes Mahapatra's verse approachable. He is not fighting his demons, only reflecting on them.

Such meekness, nay passivity, may be a plus point in poetry. The writer is watching the flowing down of the river of events, of its debris, and he has learnt to speak to himself like a stranded Robinson Crusoe. And what are the epithets with which he usually tries to grapple with the fate given perspective? — stale, sombre, charred, dunged, tired, dusty, leprous, sluggish, dank, agony, ash, smoke, odour, rusted, pain, hurt, etc. The litany or the lament are long. But there is no loud complaint, and with it no rising blood pressure; a sense of desperation but no railing at an outrageous life-circumstance. Thus, the stance of dignity is maintained almost all throughout the volume, which is of course made up of poems culled from six of his previously published volumes. A sort of stoicism against the backdrop of unease, may well be described as his life-attitude.

Of course, since reality's colours are dictated by what there is in the soul of the one who views it, Mahapatra brings to his objects and situations the colour (or non-colour, if you will) grey. Secondly, as poetry is made with one's whole body, the movements of a given body are also the rhythms its poetry enacts. This poet's reflexes are slow in movement (as distinct from the fast pace at which he has penned his volumes of poems!). At any rate as already implied, there is nothing rash, nothing impulsive in his poetic word. Softness, somewhat as in that dance style, the Orissi. However while that dance style is (at least in a true performance) all joy, joy is one thing which much the most of these poems do not express. Not joy, nor giving an uplift to reader or listener, but the mournful sound of a sarangi, and that played not as an accompaniment but by a solitary. If this parallel be true then one can also aver that this instrument is played well, expertly:

> Ah, this voice I hear now,
> what answer do I owe you?
> The tree trembles in the wind
> the house where we
> made love
> now weakens at the knees...
> And all the time
> that gathered into those
> moments
> fills the grave of the vast
> with dust.

Most of Mahapatra's poems are in the present tense, and in the first person singular — that is, when that pronoun is taken recourse to; and such combination will make for brooding, and not for the sort of poetic contemplation that comes at some remove from self, and in retrospect. Is it for this there is no laughter in these poems, nor the sparkle of wit? The poetic person here seems embedded in a self-pitying despair. And this despair, with such a firm footing in the soul of the poetic being of this poet, is projected from the subjective on to the objective plane. It is perhaps because of this that the movement of these lines is soaked in melancholia. A slow funereal march, but which of course can have its own beauty:

> Shakled to the earth it
> stands, all its dead weight

*

> A lonely pigeon floats past
> like a spirit
> over twenty-four docile
> sheep being herded
> to the municipal slaughter
> house.

* * *

Quite the contrary, in the main, is the voice of Keki Daruwalla in his *Landscapes*. If Mahapatra is vulnerable, and like the mimosa likely to retreat inwards, and there mutter his asides, Daruwalla is as forthright, and as well-fortfied, as a war-correspondent on the battle scene giving out commentaries from moment to moment. Daruwalla, on the face of it, is writing about the 'other' not about the self that writes. The difference between the two poets is crucial to critical understanding; for though each one of us is a mix of reason and emotion in one and the same world of objects and events, the emphases can vary enormously. It is for this, art comes in so many shapes and sizes.

Thus, with Daruwalla, we have to literally travel from place to place, as also (psychologically) be in one end the same frame of mind that is, a trim active one; a mind almost too conscious, and able to cope with emergencies without trouble. This matter-of-factness (no hankering after the mysteries, no slipping into any slough of despond, not given to keyed-up excitements or ecstatic delights), brings us a sensible poetry; of adventure, among people and places, with a concomitant of surprises and ironies. Daruwalla's truth is certainly stranger than fiction, and, nevertheless, this truth never snowballs into such metaphysical strangeness, or that mysteriousness, which glows from other orders of poetry. Here, there are only the ironies of history, as in the poem titled 'The Fall of Mohenjo Daro'. In it the poet tries to create the imaginative fiction, of living among the long dead. He reflects and he comments, and draws conclusions, and builds up a dextrous picture in which we can visualize the original moment. Daruwalla, unlike the meandering style that Mahapatra follows, is staccato, the sounds of words percussive, the violence and fury of the world all there. Yes he knows how describe reality. Narration and description, this is how it goes—and these are made pungent with a sprinkling of similies, smooth and apt:

> The flight is smooth,
> though taking that wide loop
> over Santa Cruz, the 747
> quivers in heat shimmer
> a hound's nose over a
> scent.

Clearly, the thus speaking voice is friendly, nay gregarious; it seems, as if, addressing someone, anyone, over the public address system.

Ergo, here, significations are more pronounced than musing or self-communion. If you are out on a safari, you have to dress rather differently than when in your place of prayer or study! This is why, in this work, and that even when the poet points out an unsavoury fact or two, these do not make an irremediable impact. What you receive are immediate sensations, like the view from a moving train—one interesting detail quickly giving way to another. Thus, even when the journey takes us to strange places, we do not loose 'touch', not become strangers to ourselves, as with certain meditative genres of art. The poet risks experience, all the exotica, and we are startled, but quickly to recover poise. Even so, we admire his cool, unruffled, running commentary:

> I go through a museum,
> traverse a bridge
> and come up against
> children
> sliding down a cannon.
>
> *
>
> We crossed the Turkish
> bridge which had stood
> the quake
> got lost in Turk-town, in the
> kebab smells
> and taped tambour music,
> till we come across
> a skinned goat that stank to
> stuga-ah well!

Daruwalla has facility with the craft of verse, and so the poems are well structured in their system of sounds; and also, since the poet is mainly an uninvolved observer of the scene they are rich in names and nouns from several continents. This prevents them from becoming dull — yes, the poet does not come to inflict the conents of his psyche on the reader. Rather, he acts as a guide to a varied territory and its baffling demography. It is for this one enjoys his work. The manner is straight forward, man to man, with no asides, few in-between-the-line meanings, no obscurities consequent on the adoption of the creed of modernism. Being to the point, and business-like, we willingly follow him through his labyrinths, to come out well rewarded with the excitements en route. Some of the images in which reality is described being memorable:

> The dandruff of expression
> has been blown from his
> eyes.
>
> *
>
> ... the awareness kissed
> away
> from the face by an occult
> mist.

The last four poems in the volume are 'for Ted Roethke'; Now these four stand a little apart from the traveller's notings of the rest of the volume. Here Daruwalla tries to mimic the Roethke style :

> A poem like a river moves
> from dark to light, a flow
> his river to was to find.
> The ice-filmed waters in
> him cracked.

Well, this section adds up to being a homage from a poet to a fellow poet, and the best compliment you can pay anyone is imitation. Daruwalla does this rather well, though he himself is a very different kind of poet. The American spoke primarily through nature; and he was a-social, even self centred. Daruwalla is far more rational, a normal being, at least so on the surface, and to go by his poems. His poetry is unlikely to cause a disordering of the senses or the alienation of the self from the human world in which we are all immersed. That there are an infinite variety of poets is all to the good; but that one poet can appreciate another gives one hope for the missing mutuality, or meeting of minds on the poetic scene.

* * *

Dom Moraes' are collected poems (1957-87), from his nineteenth year to the present. And what is the overall impression ?—that the poet's work has changed only a little from his beginnings to now. If the later poems are in somewhat regular forms; and, also, if some of them now make myths, not merely out of the contents of his own psyche but also from historical legends, classical, biblical or folk lore, we still know it is one and the same poet speaking. The voice is almost the same. Now this is nothing to regret; for, as far as one can judge, already early in the day the poet arrived at a maturity of expression, with a sure sense of form. This, from 'Sailing To England', an early poem :

> Fallen into a dream, I could
> not rise.
> I am in love, and long to
> be happy.
> Something within me
> raised her from the sea :
> A delicate sad face, and
> stones for eyes.

And this, from 'Interludes', decades later :

> The harsh wind, the heat
> And other minor matters
> On which the mind
> shatters
> Are toppling me away
> From the fortress of my
> feet
> Into a truthless day
> Where I am incomplete.

This later excerpt, sad as the former, is as lovely, but shows that the earlier maturity has been perfected. There is a quiet dignity, an unstrained expressiveness which is exquisite. These two brief samplings convince us that Moraes was, and still is, a true poet — and which fact which is too often very hard to determine. Often the matter is guess work.

And so, these poems have the density, or specific gravity, if you will, which makes them readable over and again. What the poet has mastered is not only language and meter, but also attitudes, the performance on the page. He is able to leash the usual eagerness of announcing a discovery. He knows he is making a poem, not merely out to express himself, nor give out a dazzling commentary on the state of the world. All these things are welcome, but they by themselves do not make a true poem. It is for this that almost all the poems in this volume are readable, and never tedious. One has to read a good slowly, because it has enough matter of metaphor, image or implication, packed in each other line. Now this is how Dom Moraes works his. You enjoy his smooth phrases and euphony, and then take in the meanings — each of these slowly blooming in your mind; like quiet surprises.

It has been said that this poet is self obsessed, or that he is writing from romantic or adolescent preoccupation that he is not able to forget himself — put it any way you like. It may or may not be true, but the poems are entirely free of such charges. Each of the poems is objective, meaning that each says something which invariably induces pleasurable sensations — sensations of a contemplative nature. Moraes does not draw attention to himself by a long shot; nor are finely dressed ordinary sentiments expressed anywhere in the volume. Moreover his wit is not mere cleverness, but part and parcel of deeper comprehensions. For these very reasons, the poems become independent of the maker. Most perishable stuff has been taken out of the language, so that the future reader will not be imposed upon. Only that in poetry can really last which has taken its leave of the passing moment. This is hard to do, and you can do it only if you have learnt to stand outside yourself. This, this poet does time and again.

> Hiding in caves all day,
> where water drips
> ... we felt no more shame,
> but an expected pleasure.

Keshav Malik

PTI Story — *Origin and Growth of the Indian Press and the News Agency* by G.N.S. Raghavan; Published by Press Trust of India; pp. 209; Rs 175

For the Indian Press, "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The country had begun to emerge from the Dark Age of the eighteenth century. The spark of Renaissance generated by Raja Ram Mohun Roy in the nineteenth century was steadily growing into a torch for freedom. The rising political consciousness of the people, particularly the educated middle class, had made journalism a great mission. Newspapers had sprung up imbued with the missionary zeal of spreading the nationalist spirit.

At the same time, the Indian newspapers were faced with the might and wrath of an alien ruler. A greater handicap was the absence of an agency to collect and distribute news to them rapidly. The high cost of telegraphic communication severely restricted their coverage. The situation was further aggravated by the imperialist role played by Reuters news agency which enjoyed a monopoly in selling foreign news to India and which displayed an active bias in reporting political news from India.

The story of the struggle for setting up an Indian news agency in the context of a growing Press is vividly told in the "PTI STORY — Origin and Growth of the Indian Press and the News Agency" by G.N.S. Raghavan. Though commissioned by the Press Trust of India to mark its forty years since inception, coinciding with the forty years of the country's independence, the book is neither a souvenir nor a mere chronicle of events relating to the birth and development of the news agency. The opportunity has been availed of by the author to present a synoptic view of the growth of the Indian Press not only in numbers but more importantly, in the nature of the content and coverage of the newspapers. Some major epochs in the growth of the Press are the second half of the nineteenth century (the early Renaissance era), the anti-partition movement of 1905 and the Jallianwala Bagh atrocity, and the advent of Gandhiji, both as a leader and as a journalist.

In the context of the symbiotic relationship between newspapers and news agencies, the author traces the long and tortuous struggle for establishing an Indian news agency. Case studies drive home the deliberately biased approach of Reuters to news of India, in contrast to the fair attitude of two other English journalists — Henry W. Nevinson of the *Manchester Guardian*, and B.G. Horniman of the *Bombay Chronicle*.

In this saga, the pioneering venture of Keshab Chandra Roy, the patriotic attempt of S. Sadanand and the enterprise of Bidhu Bhushan Sengupta find pride of place.

The beginning of the struggle for an Indian news agency may be traced to the enterprise of Keshab Chandra Roy who hit upon the idea in 1908. He called the Agency the Associated Press of India on the lines of the Associated Press of America.

The agency met a great need of the time. Many newspapers, appreciating the value of the service of such an agency for their own fuller coverage, subscribed to API. Disturbed by the success of API, Reuters took advantage of the financial difficulties of the Indian agency and succeeded within three years of API's coming into being, in acquiring it as its own subsidiary. Roy set up another agency — the Indian News Bureau — but it proved no match to the unequal competition from Reuters - API.

The next landmark was the challenge posed by Sadanand when he launched the Free Press of India news service in 1927. This time, the imperial authority simply bludgeoned the news agency out of existence by exerting all kinds of pressures, censoring the FPI telegrams, and by threats to newspapers.

The United Press of India (UPI), started by Bidhu Bhushan Sengupta in 1933, met with better success than the Indian News Bureau but it waged a losing battle as it lacked both financial strength and official help.

With individual efforts failing, attention was turned to newspapers coming together to set up an agency. The Indian & Eastern Newspapers Society approached Reuters with a proposal for transferring API to Indian newspapers. But Reuters rebuffed the idea. When, however, it became clear that India would achieve independence, Reuters, hoping to continue its presence in India, agreed to a partnership with Indian newspapers. And the hope of having a news agency owned by Indian newspapers was realised when editors of seven Indian newspapers formed the Press Trust of India on 27 August 1947 — within two weeks of the country becoming independent. The PTI—Reuter partnership agreement was signed the next year and the operations of the Reuters subsidiary, API, were transferred to PTI in 1949.

But Reuters observed the agreement more in its breach, and the uneasy partnership was ended in 1953. Instead, a news buyer-seller arrangement was made. This removed the fetters on PTI and it became free to grow in accordance with its own aspirations.

Over the four decades since 1949, PTI has registered impressive growth, modernisation and diversification. Some indices of progress : number of teleprinter-linked offices up from 37 to 132; three-fold increase in the length of teleprinter lines leased; a whopping increase in the annual turnover; introduction of specialised services like the feature service, science, economic and sports specials; starting of services to non-media subscribers like the Reuter Monitor service, valuable particularly to banks, trading corporations and business enterprises; the News-Scan service which instantly brings news to office rooms, hotels and airports; and the latest Stock-Scan giving news of trading in stock exchanges. The agency's venture into television journalism has already caught on.

With the coming into existence of PTI as an Indepedent domestic news agency owned by newspapers, one of the twin aims of the struggle has been achieved. The other aim, namely an Indian international news agency, remains to be realised. When PTI launches PTI International—which it is poised to do — it will be fulfilling Jawaharlal Nehru's vision indicated to the Indian newspaper editors in 1946.

In telling the PTI story, the author has, for the first time, drawn from the records of API and early years of PTI. The book makes good and easy reading. Written with an economy of words, and enriched by the author's comments, it bears in its footnotes, ample evidence of the research done. "PTI STORY" is an account of another facet of India's struggle for independence. PTI has done well to choose such an enduring way to commemorate its fortieth year.

G. Venkataraman

Jammu and Kashmir Folklore by Somnath Dhar, Marwah Publications, H-39, Green Park Ext., New Delhi-16; pp. 196 Rs 100

Indian folklorists could derive a lesson from the life and work of the world's greatest story teller — Gunadya — whose life remains shrouded in mystery and whose monumental work in Paisachi, *Brihat Katha*, in its original form, is extinct. I do not agree that Gunadya was a Kashmiri and those who say so, positively, have little to prove their point. But whatever his origin, the cardinal sin he committed was to compose his work in Paisachi, a language which was spoken and understood by the common man, as against Sanskrit, the court language. The court and its 'jewels' so decided that Paisachi— which Gunadya used was as classical and as expressive as Sanskrit — must die because no 'inferior' language could challenge Sanskrit's supremacy.

Kshemendra, the great Kashmiri poet who lived in the 11th century, tells us how the disciples of Gunadya, facing persecution at the hands of the Sanskrit zealots backed by the court, organised a sacrificial fire, witness to which were thousands of commoners. With tears streaming down their eyes, the disciples after reciting each page of the *Brihat Katha* consigned it to the fire, after it was read, heard and remembered. Sounds like a folk-tale but that was how, in all probability, *Brihat Katha* and Paisachi became extinct. We do not know how monumental was the work but what has been resurrected by Kshemendra in his *Manjari* and, later, more competently and exhaustively, by Somadeva, another famous Kashmiri writer, in his *Katha-Sarita-Sagar*, shows that latter-day Sanskrit litterateurs pale before Gunadya's genius. That is so also because folk literature reflects the urges and aspirations, the frustrations and mirth of the common people who are unpolluted by ideologies. What Somadeva has done is to show how near Gunadya was to the people and how popular.

Folklorists often tend to take a casual look at the vast ocean of folk-literature, without diving deep and without making the reader appreciate how deep are its roots.

Jammu and Kashmir, as Prof Somnath Dhar has pointed out, has passed through many political upheavals in its history and has seen much repression which has distorted the traditions and the value systems of its people. The ancient Kashmiri, Dogri and Ladakhi folklore, or at least a substantial part of it, is lost to us and what is still available has undergone a good deal of mutation. For instance, no attempt has been made to record any of the original Kashmiri ballads, and what is treated as original now is the creation of poets in the past few decades and written in the Persian script. It took a Somadeva to rediscover Gunadya and a similar effort is needed to resurrect Kashmiri folklore and prevent it from becoming extinct in the next few decades. Traditional *Wanvun* (wedding songs) is being replaced by film songs at marriage ceremonies and there are hardly any old persons — left to sing the traditional songs at various religious and social functions.

Any attempt, therefore, to revive folklore is commendable. Prof Dhar is a well-known folklorist. He deserves credit for giving us a bird's-eye view of the folklore of the three regions of the State, written competently and with dedication.

It is not possible to do full justice to the subject in 196 pages, considering how vast it is. Prof Dhar has attempted a good introduction to the subject which should evoke the curiosity and interest of even those who believe that folklorists swim against the current.

The folklore of Jammu and Kashmir is as rich as that of the rest of India, which, like the Chinese, is the most ancient and authentic in the world. The State, "with its three clearly defined regions of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh presents a varied cultural spectrum", says Dr Karan

Singh in his foreword to the book. Himself a folklorist, having done commendable work on the folk-songs of Jammu, he adds, "Prof Somnath Dhar has rendered valuable service by undertaking a study of the folklore from the three regions of the State". He might have added that this one is a first of the genre, treating the three folklores under the same cover.

The author starts the book on the right note with a description of the region and the people, glimpses the history of the State and goes on to discuss the languages and dialects, customs and rites, festivals and fairs, etc. Then follow informative, analytical critiques of the folklores of the three regions. Folk arts, folk music, folk dance and other entertainments — none too few — are discussed in two interesting chapters. In the oral literature part (76-page appendices), there is a sampling of folk-songs of Kashmir, Ladakhi folk-tales and proverbs and riddles from Jammu. Gilgit, though under Pakistani illegal occupation, should have been included for its folklore. To quote an example : saffron fields of Pampore near Srinagar are world-famous. While picking saffron flowers in late autumn, a village belle sings :

Towards Pampore went away my darling,
Saffron flowers caught him in fragrant embrace;
O, he is there, and ah me ! I am here,
When, where, O God, would I see his face?

M.K. Dhar

1. **Between Nobodies and Stars** by Keshav Malik; Abhinav publications; pp. 136; Rs 60
2. **Negatives** by Keshav Malik; Poetry Time Publications; Popular Bound Edition; pp. 47; Rs 10
3. **Shapes in Peeling Plaster** by Keshav Malik; Arnold-Heinemann; pp. 74; Price not stated

Keshav Malik — His Poetry

It does not seem to me that on reading *Negatives*, *Shapes in Peeling Plaster* and *Between Nobodies and Stars* by Keshav Malik, anyone could deny that he is a poet and can write poetry. This may seem a grudging admission, but if so, it is only because the critical Indian reader is inundated today with free verse that its authors delude themselves is poetry. Here at last is someone with dignity but without exaggerated pretension, who has read enough and knows enough of the English language, its tones, over and under, and those nuances that are the language of poetry, to be able to write it.

But to have even this rare asset would not have been enough if the poet were not immediately recognisable as having something to say for our times. Keshav Malik is a poet of place rather than of time; he is unmistakably Asian and Indian, even more than he is of the late 20th Century. But his poems are so much the offspring of his own personal sensibility and thoughtfulness, that one is not tempted to find him a place and time even in his own century. In a Preface to *Between Nobodies and Stars*, a prose collection reflecting him, he says that his engagement "has been with space, time and human destiny, as also with the sensing individual who stands and interacts with these not always fully articulated invisibles." This is a good description of his poetry, that moves easily from the casual to the cosmic, less easily back from the stars to earth. He asks, as poets do, unanswerable questions, but his merit lies less in this, than in the fact that the reader who rises from a reading of his poems, does so revolving the questions that they throw out. And this, though the intelligent reader knows that he will find no answers to this side of the rainbow. For in poetry of this kind, everything is in the manner of travelling: one never arrives at certainties, but is mysteriously the wiser for travelling.

In *An Average Day* the poet who is always and irretrievably Keshav Malik — he wears no mask, seeks no disguise — Malik is "thirty-five, the proper age for one to realise that one had to live

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in a world of other people, that one had to put up with things, that one had to shelve so many of one's protests." There is a streak in this and allied writing of the Puritan, to me very pleasing in times in which Puritanism is just short of being a bad word. Elsewhere in the same revealing volume Malik says: "I was ashamed and lost the art of smiling." How much, indeed, is there today to smile about?

The title essay of *Between Nobodies and Stars* is in some ways less good than the others: it used tired phrases like "the scheme of things" and "my own humble Indian station." Keshav Malik is too sensitive to be arrogant, but he is certainly not humble. And what of his "station"? Poets as good as he have no "station" except of their own creating, and this is why we read them. But the essay has the merit of recognising his schizophrenia "this other part of me", that has the virtue of compassion and frequently expends itself on the dying embers of life, on the victimisation of men by other men and by life.

There is about so many of the poems in *Negatives* and *Shapes in Peeling Plaster* an invading sadness that never lifts, but that is authentic. For, so the poet seems to be saying, no matter how consistently he seeks to achieve perspective by distancing himself from people, and contemplating space and the universe, one cannot be entirely without awareness of, and so pity for, immediate human suffering in India. And this is where Malik scores, for he remains a spokesman for the *Indian* human condition— one's pity is always evoked, and sometimes demanded.

Negatives is an earlier and more experimental volume than *Shapes in Peeling Plaster*. It has its moments: *Correctitude* ends thus:

> "I say break out of it,
> if you will not break."

And in *By Zigzag Paths* he says: "The heart knows no direct routes." *Escape* is memorable for its concluding lines:

> "Yes, my spirit wrote her signature
> In the deep waters."

But this small anthology suggests directions for growth, more than it confirms achievement.

Not so the later *Shapes in Peeling Plaster* that contains several poems in which pride and sensibility co-exist, and in which the poet speaks from the depths of a consciousness that, though always complex, is never abstruse. Thus in *Ground*, he writes:

> "The past has all tricked out it seems
> the brimming reservoir of my past
> drained out into the hazy seas of insensible thought;
> now only an inkling remains that
> there was a me before

this me."

In the title poem, he goes on:

"Years I have eyed them —
bull and bird on wall —
each as if quietly quizzing
the other."

And in *Song III*, with its tone of inevitability, Malik writes:

"There's something
keeps me
from shooing away
the close-creeping night."

He moves to the finality of *Going One's Way*:

"I have made up my mind
to go my way
Now come what may
I will see to it
that a raving beauty is ablaze
on the ground of human disgrace."

These examples may not cohere and jump to give us the whole poet— no mere extracts could. But the two volumes do suggest that Keshav Malik is essentially a *private* poet. He does not celebrate our times though he pities their victims. He sees life, not whole, but steadily, for there is a lack of sudden exuberance in which everybody bursts out singing. There is practically no love theme such as:

"If I should go away
Beloved, do not say:
'He has forgotten me'
for you abide
A singing rib within my
dreaming side."

There is, too, no sign of the martial or the swinging rhythm that celebrates man's rare conquest of himself or his environment with exultant bands. All these would, in appropriate tone and degree, make his vision "whole". Instead, we have the haunting sensibility of one who echoes "Man, Man, you cannot live entirely without pity"; the obsessive need for philosophic proportion, the scientist subserving the poet, the philosopher insisting that the encompassing truth be recognised among the million daily interruptions.

All Malik's poems in these volumes are lyrics, generally sad, always thoughtful, sometimes touched with melancholy. But there is no long poem to test muscularity or stamina. You may not of course tell a poet what to write about, or even how much you would like him to expend his talent on the sad story of our times in irony or disgust. A poet must be left to find his own themes. But I sometimes wish that I could hear the deeper sound of indignation, an Audenesque but Indian criticism of life (for Malik does visit Ischia) of which I believe him to be capable.

Muriel Wasi

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